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Marxism Today

MAURICE THOREZ	THE STRUGGLE IN FRANCE
EMILE BURNS	LESSONS OF THE FRENCH EVENTS
JOHN MAHON	THE WORKING CLASS PARTY
LEONARD THOMAS	THE POUND AND THE STERLING AREA
REUBEN FALBER	BRITAIN'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM
DISCUSSION:	
MAURICE CORNFORTH	PHILOSOPHY, CRITICISM AND PROGRESS: REPLY TO DISCUSSION

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Marxism Today

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CONTENTS

		page
Maurice THOREZ	**The Struggle in France** ... Speech summing up the position in France on June 10th	... 193
Emile BURNS	**Lessons of the French Events** ... Examines Socialist Party's refusal of unity and its result.	199
John MAHON	**The Working Class Party** ... Discusses the type of Party needed by the British working class.	204
Leonard THOMAS	**The Pound and the Sterling Area** Shows the development of the sterling area and its present problems.	209
Reuben FALBER	**Britain's Electoral System** ... Examines the electoral system and proposals for reform.	215
DISCUSSION		
Maurice CORNFORTH	**Philosophy, Criticism and Progress** Reply to the discussion.	220

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The Struggle in France

Maurice Thorez

(Closing speech, slightly abridged, at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of France, June 10th, 1958)

THE significance of the present situation is that the plot against the Republic has attained its first objective: de Gaulle is in power. A serious blow has been struck at the working class and democracy.

In reality, the de Gaulle Government is not a government like others. The mask of legality that it wears, its respect on the surface for the formalities of investiture by Parliament, certain manœuvres made by the head of the Government to adjust himself to what he calls the "system" and the men of the "system"—nothing in all this can hide the essential fact: de Gaulle has been brought to power not by the free will of the National Assembly, but by the rebel actions of Algeria and Ajaccio. The de Gaulle Government is a fundamentally illegitimate government, the issue of violence and reactionary threats.

Moreover its head has refused, right up to the last, to condemn the rebel actions. He claims to have come forward as an arbiter between France and the rebels, and this, he said, prevented him from prejudging any decision he would be called upon to make. But in reality, there is nothing of an arbiter about him. It is *he* who was the source of the whole plot; it was *his men* who led the entire operation. . . .

After having got rid of Parliament, de Gaulle went to Algeria. And there everything became clear. He expressed the wish that the movement born in Algeria should set all France aflame. He declared that his task was to "regenerate" everything, to change everything. In short, he means to do in France what has been done in Algeria, to organise the rebel agitation here, too, and reject the sovereignty of the people.

Already the rebels are not satisfied with having set up, in Algiers and Ajaccio, organs of civil war which usurp and profane the glorious name of "Committees of Public Safety". They openly proclaim their intention to set up committees of this type all over France, and General Descours insolently echoes their words in Lyons.

Organs of Rebellion

In maintaining the Committees of Public Safety in Algeria, de Gaulle is maintaining and authorising the organs of rebellion. In the name of "integration of souls", these committees are intended to carry out the forcible subjection of the Moslem population and of the democratic elements of European origin—to ensure submission by violence pure and simple.

And when in France, too, these committees emerge from underground, when there is talk of spreading them throughout the country, no one can have any illusions as to the role assigned to them. The aim here, too, is to make violence prevail. The first article in the programme of these committees is to abolish the last traces of the "system", that is to say democracy. They want, as they put it, to "liquidate all the rubbish". In particular they proclaim their intention to get the Communist Party banned—by which they pay involuntary homage to the Party of the working class, resolutely loyal to the struggle for peace and democracy.

The mask is being torn off in spite of the efforts made by de Gaulle, like all representatives of fascist movements, to try to be "cunning"—this is the expression he himself has used in speaking of the qualities necessary for a leader. For example, he has been equivocal throughout as to the policy he intends to follow in Algeria.

After his Press conference and up to the time of his investiture, his supporters were saying that the liberal solution he would find for this problem would surprise us. In fact, in spite of all the efforts of a fawning Press to discover some "shades of meaning" in what he said, he has quite simply adopted the Soustelle-Lacoste "solution". By proclaiming that there are 10 million French in Algeria and that the country is French for ever, he has made impossible any peaceful outcome of the conflict.

Thus on the question on which he had tried to sow most illusions, de Gaulle has quickly shown his true face: the man of war to the end. And already the F.L.N., the government of Tunisia and that of Morocco, have all taken their stand against his policy.

De Gaulle's intentions in social matters are equally devoid of mystery. The fact alone that he has demanded the right to change social legislation in his own way, by simple decrees, says enough. The right to strike, the law on factory committees and delegates, and other working class gains, are directly threatened.

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De Gaulle, too, did not wish the local authorities to be untouched by his plenary powers. It is enough to see the fate of the municipal authorities in Corsica to form an idea of the respect he has for loçal liberties.

On foreign affairs, de Gaulle is used to making fine speeches about national independence, about the sovereignty of France, and the freedom of action necessary in relation to the United States. The wind has blown them away. President Eisenhower and his principal in Europe, Adenauer, are not deceived. The empty talk in which de Gaulle indulged yesterday does not prevent them today from hailing his accession to power and sending warm wishes for his success.

It can be seen that in all spheres, in spite of the demagogy and voluntary lack of precision in the programme, the truth is coming to light: the de Gaulle Government and its policy represent a grave danger for the working class, for democracy, for France.

This danger is all the greater because special laws extorted, like his investiture itself, by threats, have given General de Gaulle special powers, which amount to a real dictatorship. The whole arsenal of the state is at his disposal.

In these grave hours, the working class has fought well. Thanks to the action of the masses, alerted by our Party, thanks to the correct tactics of the Communist Party, the play has not been carried through in the time and in the forms which had been planned. The masses are mobilised, our forces are intact, and have even grown in numbers.

However, de Gaulle is there, the workers and democrats have not succeeded in barring his road to power. A crisis of the regime began, and it ended in the formation of a government of personal dictatorship which opens the way to fascism.

That is the first feature of the situation, and its importance must not be minimised.

What Social Forces are there Behind de Gaulle?

There is not only the state behind de Gaulle. He is also supported by certain social forces—the most colonialist, the most chauvinist and the most reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie.

Some time back, the most retrograde elements grouped themselves round that "Rassemblement du Peuple Francais", which de Gaulle founded and which was liquidated by universal suffrage.

Behind him are the large banks like Lazard's and Rothschild's which he refused to nationalise after the liberation. These are the financial houses which control the main wealth of Northern Africa. The choice of the Director-General of the Rothschild Bank to head the Cabinet of the new President of the Council is in itself a whole programme. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is linked with the Mirabaud Bank. At the Ministry of Economic Affairs the big employers are represented by their confidence man, Pinay.

De Gaulle is in power in order to carry out the orders of the big industrialists who are interested in robbing the wealth of Algeria, such as the members of the Usinor Trust, which produces 15 per cent of French steel and which owns mines in Algeria.

De Gaulle represents the interests of the big settlers who financed the rebel movement: it has been proved that the enterprise of Soustelle and company were financed by them. . . .

Certain sections of the urban petty-bourgeoisie sometimes allow themselves to be dragged along by the chauvinist stream. On the other hand the working peasants are very far from feeling enthusiasm for a military dictatorship, for a power which makes war. The intellectuals hate the negation of humanism and of thought which fascism brings.

There has been a damaging attempt to draw in ex-servicemen. We have not forgotten the role that the nationalist leaders of the ex-servicemen's association played on February 6th, 1934, and also in support of Pétain after having taken part in negotiations with Hitler. The ex-servicemen cannot let themselves be caught twice in the same trap.

De Gaulle does not represent any compromise or conciliation between Parties. Like all reactionary governments, his government defends the interests of the big bourgeoisie. The fact that the army is the instrument of his power shows once again the link between the war policy and the policy of reaction and of fascism—each feeds the other. An imperalist policy means always, as Lenin has shown, reaction all along the line inside the country itself.

This truth is particularly evident when imperialist policy finds its expression in colonial war. Recent events have once more shown the correctness of Marx's statement that a people which oppresses another cannot itself be free. In the same way they confirm Guesde's statement on colonial war as the school of civil war.

Certainly we do not forget that the army includes other elements besides the rebels. There are also in it the sons of the working class, the sons of the working peasantry and other sections of working people, and the love of the people and of democracy lives on in their hearts and is inextinguishable. There are still officers faithful to the Republic in the army. But it must be recog-

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nised that in its present composition the army has taken on more and more the character of a mercenary band, that it has been more and more encouraged to place itself above the nation. This is particularly true of the special corps, the best equipped and the best trained troops like the parachutists.

Our army has not had the opportunity in recent years of winning many victories. It was overwhelmed in 1940. And then the French reactionaries followed the example of the German chauvinists, who in 1918 spoke of the betrayal of the army by the rear, and the example of the tsarist apologists in Russia who had also blamed the rear for the defeat of the armies in 1905 and in 1917. Our reaction, too, declared that the débâcle of 1940 was due to unpreparedness, to the shortcomings of the civil power.

But the opposite is the truth; there had never been such great efforts in France, there had never been such large sums spent on the army as in the years before the Second World War. Eighteen years ago it was only treachery at the head of the state and of the army which opened France to the Hitlerite invaders.

Since 1943, in Algeria and then in Paris, the Communists have striven unceasingly for the formation of a great French army capable of playing its full part at the end of the war and relying on the former Resistance fighters for its cadres. General de Gaulle at that time chose the opposite solution: he maintained an army small in numbers and as far as possible separated from the people. He had no confidence in the masses. Even after that, when compulsory military service was re-established, when the army numbered hundreds of thousands, the sons of working people have been treated like military hirelings. Special troops have been formed and developed, among whom, as Jaurès said, force and ambition have been encouraged instead of pride in liberty and justice. Now we see the activities of the troops and in particular of the parachutists. They have been the instrument for the rebellion in Algeria and in Corsica.

At the same time as reactionary elements have been encouraged in the army, Republican officers have been dismissed or deprived of commands, and the same operation has been carried out in the police. The army has become more and more estranged from the nation. In addition to all this, the army has been used in wars that were unjust and lost in advance, against peoples desiring their independence, and using means which have aroused much condemnation.

Such are the conditions in which de Gaulle has achieved power, such is the social design of his dictatorship.

How was the Plot able to Succeed?

The Gaullist plot marks not the strength of the bourgeoisie but its weakness. In resorting to personal power, to dictatorship, it recognises that it is not able to safeguard its rule by traditional means. It confesses its inability to settle the problems facing it in its decadence.

From another angle, the success of the plot would not have been possible but for the relative weakness, the disunity of the working class and democratic forces—the disunity built up on anti-communism.

It is not by chance that it was de Gaulle who contributed more than anyone else to this anti-communist campaign. We can recall how he threw himself into this campaign of division twelve years ago, after he had given up power because he could not resign himself to governing under the control of the People's Deputies, and with Ministers who were not simple figureheads.

In fact, was it not following on a visit to Colombey (de Gaulle's residence) that the Prime Minister of 1947, Ramadier, removed the Communist Ministers from the Government? All democrats agree today who it is that profits from the ostracism operated against the representatives of 6 million French men and women, and where all the anti-communist manœuvres lead, from the alleged "third force" up to the famous Republican front of January 2nd, 1956—which included, we must not forget, de Gaullists, Soustelle and Chaban-Delmas.

Up to the last moment the political representatives of big capital speculated on the habitual hesitations of the petty-bourgeoisie, making them believe that the threat could come from the Communist workers. Their aim was quite simple: to distract attention from the fascist plot, to cover up the plot against liberty.

As for the ideologists of the petty-bourgeoisie, some of them have continued through the height of the political crisis to use every kind of argument to conceal their poltroonery. They tried at first to blame their own passivity on the working class, speaking of its "apathy", of its "lack of reaction".

Shortly afterwards, when the working class had shown its power, the same people exclaimed "it is too late" or "this is not the moment". Now, the good apostles are trying to demobilise the masses by putting about the idea that the de Gaulle Government is a government "like the others", on the ground that the ministers include those

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responsible for the old policy—for the criminal policy of dividing the working class. Or again, they declare "this government will not last, in a few months de Gaulle will collapse by himself, under the weight of all his difficulties". We know what such illusions and such waiting to see what would happen cost the Italian and the German people.

In the advent of de Gaulle to power, a very heavy responsibility rests on the Socialist Party and on its leaders, in particular men like Guy Mollet and Lacoste. We have in mind not only the events of the last two weeks. It is a question of the whole policy followed by the Socialist Party since 1947.

The word "treason" is used by the minority section of the Socialist Party in their journal. They show how present events are the direct result of the policy of war in Algeria, the adventure of Suez, the constant refusal by the Socialist leaders of unity of the working class. Even in the most recent period when the danger was knocking at the doors, when the Socialist parliamentary group declared almost unanimously to support the strike called by the C.G.T.—even then the Socialist leaders of the Right did not fail to show their hand. They acted as common strike-breakers. What they did was based on the formula proclaimed by Mollet himself: "I prefer Gaullism to the Popular Front." Mollet continued to pretend that the choice was between de Gaulle and communism, while what was in question was to ensure not the success of communism but the unity of all working class and democratic forces, whatever differences existed between them, against the dictatorship.

In this recent period we have seen more clearly still what the Socialist leaders of the Right have done with democracy inside their organisation. Mollet has acted without intermission behind the back of his Party. He only informed his Executive Committee and the Parliamentary group after he had acted.

The leaders of the Force Ouvrière also wanted to capitulate. When the C.G.T., with which these leaders had always refused to agree on any action to be carried out, called for strikes on Tuesday, May 27th, they called for strikes for the Wednesday. They had the secret hope that neither movement would succeed and that labour would give a demonstration of its weakness. It must be said that the C.G.T. upset this calculation. For its part, our Party, by deciding to take part along with the C.G.T. in the demonstration of Wednesday, May 28th, enabled the strength of the working class and of democracy to be brilliantly displayed in Paris. Thus all the manœuvres to paralyse the masses failed. Resistance was organised. The battle was opened. It soon became clear to our people that the country had been brought into the present crisis not by excess of democracy, as the enemies of the Republic say, but by the lack of democracy, by violations of democracy, by the constant restriction on popular liberties: the prohibition of demonstrations, the seizure of working class papers, prosecutions of militants and of soldiers loyal to the democratic ideal.

The rights of Parliament have been more and more restricted. The initiative in expenditure has been taken from it. In spite of the Constitution which categorically prohibits the use of decrees, and still more strongly the delegation of plenary powers, the executive more and more drew away from control by the National Assembly. Governments which fear the people cannot but fear control by the deputies elected by the people. And now the aim that de Gaulle has set himself is the final suppression of all democracy, of all control from below. Early in the autumn he proposes a plebiscite to ratify an authoritarian constitution which will take all power from the hands of representatives of the people.

Say "Non"

All workers, all democrats, all enemies of personal power, must prepare from today for the overwhelming "*NON*" from our people when they are consulted in October. From today all our activity must be set on the organisation of this great campaign.

To understand what de Gaulle is aiming at it is enough to realise what are the conditions in which he intends to operate, a month from now, a measure preparatory to the referendum of October, that is, the municipal elections in Algeria. What an outrageous imposture such elections are! Two years ago they declared that it was impossible to elect new representatives from Algeria to the National Assembly because the war was going on; does anyone imagine that conditions have changed in Algeria? The truth is that they have got worse. The F.L.N. will issue the slogan of non-participation in the municipal elections. The elections will be physically impossible in vast areas where operations of war are going on. The vote—and what a vote!—will only take place in a handful of towns which remain more or less under the control of the military administration. In the polling booths there will be machine-guns on tables, and it will be no doubt the parachutists who will carry through the count. In these conditions what value will these municipal elections have?

And what value will the autumn referendum

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have as far as Algeria is concerned? It is as good as saying that millions of ballot papers "*oui*" will be put into the ballot box for the sole purpose of falsifying the results of the referendum in France.

Every day from now on the people can see the seriousness of the danger. The task is to gather together the masses, to unite the Republicans of all shades of opinion for resistance, shoulder to shoulder, against fascism. The gathering together of the forces of the Left will be based in particular on the anti-fascist committees, the Committees of Republican Defence, which should be elected in mass meetings of the people, in the factories, in the towns and in each of our villages. Congresses, democratically organised, will be able to elect the directing bodies from these thousands of committees at the base.

It is only in this way that the committees will strike deep roots in the masses and will be guaranteed against any instability, against attempts to divide them. It is in this way that the mobilisation of the masses will be best achieved, in order to strike back without delay at any demonstration of fascist character, at any attack on militants and republicans or on the headquarters of popular organisations, at any attack on the democratic Press.

Time for Unity

It is the time for unity.

Nevertheless, some of those who could with justice be beating their breasts for having too often yielded to anti-communism, are today worried by the support which the masses are showing towards the Communist Party. They are less worried about the unity of all our forces that is necessary. Articles of this kind have been appearing in the Press in the last few days, under the signature of men who nevertheless declare themselves against de Gaulle.

Those who still today, like M. Mitterand, have not succeeded in getting rid of their anti-communism, seem to forget the elementary needs of the struggle and the obvious urgency of unity.

It is said that the non-Communist deputies who voted against the investiture of de Gaulle are talking of forming a group from which we Communists will be excluded.

It must be said that such a grouping would only be the continuation of the famous Committee of Republican Vigilance formed last month by the parties in power. It would be simply cut off from the majority of its former members now that that majority has rallied behind the President-Dictator. That means that they would continue the same vacillations, and that the rousing of the masses in defence of the Republic would continue to be hampered.

As we for our part have always declared, whatever opinions people may have on what the France of tomorrow will do, should be no obstacle to the immediate unity of all the adversaries of the fascist reaction, of all Republican activities. And all these activities should be directed to one single aim, to ensure "*NON*" in the referendum, to defend public liberties and to safeguard the people's rights.

We know that the democratic republic, as Engels and Lenin said, represents an enormous historical advance. The working class defends this ground that we have conquered, on which it can organise, express itself and prepare its own future, which is the future of France. The working class means to defend the democratic rights won by our fathers, in struggle and with heavy sacrifices. It is not when there is a reactionary and military dictatorship, it is not when fascism puts the workers in chains and imprisons their militants and dissolves their organisations, that the working class is happier, stronger, nearer to socialism.

Each person, among the democrats, retains his programme and his own ideas. We, too, have our ideas on what would be the best constitution. But while defending our ideas, and our programme and everything for which we exist as a Communist Party, we repeat once again that all through this period we have not had, and we do not now have, any other desire but to save democratic liberties and to guarantee the rights of the working class. We have never asked and we do not ask from the Parties and the groupings which claim to be on the Left, anything but the application of their own programme.

The essential thing is for all to unite to say "*NON*" to personal dictatorship to what they call "the strong power".

Stable Government

Workers and democrats are for a strong government and a stable government, but what is a strong and stable government?

It is not a government which rests on bayonets, which maintains itself by violence, deception and demagogy. It is not a government which counts above all on the support of the banks, big industry and the colonies.

A strong government, a stable government, is a government which rests on the people, which does not fear control by the people, which remains faithful to the undertakings given to the people.

Once again, it is to say the opposite of the truth when the misfortunes of France are attri-

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buted to an excess of democracy, and to call on the people to condemn democracy in the October referendum. We must remember what Lenin said: "The baby must not be thrown out with the bath water." In the same way democracy must not be thrown out, Parliament must not be thrown overboard, under the pretext of correcting shortcomings.

What is necessary is to put right the wrong use that has been made of the institutions, and to guarantee that they function normally. The problem is to ensure that democracy is not falsified by a host of arbitrary restrictions, by the practice of discriminatory measures against the elected representatives of the working class. At the meeting of our Central Committee at the end of March, we Communists already put forward our ideas on the programme to save the nation that a Government of the Left could carry out.

In the great battle which has opened the Communists only ask to take the place that belongs to them—nothing but their place, but their full place—alongside the other democratic parties and groupings. They are determined to support every step forward that serves the interests of the people.

The agreement between all Republicans is not only necessary, but possible. We have been able to see the progress made even in the National Assembly, among the Socialist Deputies and other Deputies faithful to democracy. A Socialist leader who was one of the first to support de Gaulle the Trotskyist demagogue and adversary of unity, Boutbien, himself said that a Popular Front climate was being built up in the Assembly.

And what is there frightening in that? In 1936 the government of the Popular Front was the government formed within the strict limits of the constitution, a government presided over by a Socialist, a government supported by the working class and its Communist Party, a government which did much for the workers and for the Republic. It is not surprising that especially in days such as these we are passing through the memory of 1936 should live in the minds of the workers and all Republicans.

The great, magnificent demonstration recalled the demonstration of 1935 not only by the numbers and breadth of its participants, but by the fraternal spirit of the representatives of different views and will for unity and action. Far from having been surprised and paralysed by the plot, the masses gave a vigorous reply. There is every reason to believe that the future belongs to democracy and not to its enemies.

Our Fine Party

Our Party has stood the test. It is united around its Central Committee whose authority has grown even greater. Day after day, hour after hour, the leadership of the Party has known how to act and to lead the Party into the struggle. The Parliamentary group has given proof of its political maturity and readiness to fight. And what must be said of the activity of the militants in our districts and branches from one end of the country to the other! Often they have been on the job day and night. During the day they have worked in the factory and afterwards organised demonstrations, protected the offices of our organisation, distributed pamphlets and leaflets by millions and ensured massive sales of our paper. New cadres have come to the front, tempered in the struggle: men and women able to organise, to show initiative, to guide the action of the masses. Events have disclosed an inestimable reserve of new militants.

In the recent period the print of *Humanité* has doubled. Special editions are snatched up as soon as issued. Now we must make a sustained effort to consolidate this advance, to keep the new readers of our paper and to win others.

Numerous applications for membership have been received by the Party; we must follow this up. In recent weeks very many workers have been aroused to political life; thousands and thousands of sympathisers have come into the struggle alongside of us. It is possible to recruit on a large scale, to hold public meetings of our branches, inviting sympathisers to join in their work and to come and reinforce them. It is possible to set up a large number of new branches, especially in the factories. It is also necessary to make a considerable effort to ensure the financial aid of the masses to our Party. Facts have proved wrong what the pessimists thought of our youth—that it was indifferent and apathetic. The young people have been in the battle, eager and active. Young workers, young students, young women, have come into the front ranks of the fight for liberty. The successes obtained in recruitment and in the distribution of our press, and above all the mobilisation of the masses, are the fruit of the correct line that our Party has followed and of its firmness in principle. In this period good comrades who have been troubled for a time by the dissident activity of certain revisionist elements have now again rallied to us.

Our Party has shown unity and it has been as firm as a rock, in contrast to the Socialist Party and all the other parties, which have been divided when the testing time came as they had been in 1940 by Vichy, and who have had the experience

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of desertions and treachery. While in 1939, for example, the enemy succeeded in disrupting certain sections of our followers, today our Party is surrounded by a great mass of sympathisers, more confident and more numerous than ever. All see it as the principal force of democracy and liberty.

If the Party has been able to fight this battle in such good conditions it is because it has fought unceasingly against all deviations. It is because it has used its tested method of organisation, democratic centralism, as against the false democracy whose sad example is obvious in others. It is because above all it has remained faithful to the principles of Marx and Lenin, faithful to the working class; it is because it has been able to raise high the banner of the defence of democratic liberties, the banner of peace and of the true interests of the nation.

Now, dear Comrades, to work, full of confidence and determination. Organise the struggle of the masses for the abolition of the personal dictatorship, for the "*NON*" in the referendum, for peace in Algeria, for the re-establishment of Republican liberties, for a France free, strong and happy.

Lessons of the French Events

Emile Burns

THE return of de Gaulle to power in France, coupled with the suspension of Parliament by its own vote, mark the climax of a process of systematic division of the working class and progressive forces by the monopolists of France under the banner of anti-communism. At any time in the now fourteen years since the Provisional Government was formed in Algeria in 1944, unity of the working class and progressive forces of France could have stopped the advance of reaction, the worsening of the conditions of the French working class and peasants, the colonial wars and the subjection to the United States. That unity lasted only a short time after the liberation of France, and has never since been re-established, has been due above all to the right-wing leaders of the French Socialist Party whose anti-communism has been their only consistent policy.

When de Gaulle set up the French Provisional Government in Algiers the Resistance in France was at the height of its activities, and the National Council of Resistance in France itself consisted of representatives of Communists, Socialists, Radicals, Catholics and all other groups playing an active part in the fight against the Occupation. That the Communists formed the main core of the Resistance is proved by the enormous growth in the membership of the Party after the Liberation and its influence among the people. But it was some time before de Gaulle was willing to admit Communist representatives into the Provisional Government; it was of course purely a nominated body—nominated by de Gaulle. However, the National Council of Resistance insisted, and two Communists—Billoux and Grenier—joined the Provisional Government in April 1944.

With the liberation of Paris and the establishment there of the Provisional Government, de Gaulle, supported by the monopolists, soon set about breaking up the popular forces of the Resistance and, together with the British and American military, protecting the Vichyites not only from the prosecutions for treachery demanded by the people but also from being removed from positions in the administrative and judicial apparatus. Nine out of ten of the French judges who tried the cases of the collaborationists had themselves been on the bench under the Vichy regime.

On the other hand, the democratic forces pressed for the inclusion of the Free French forces in the Army and for the carrying out of the purge of Vichyites that had been promised. They also pressed for elections to be held and a regular Government established as soon as possible.

During 1944 the Socialists were working closely with the Communists, carrying forward the alliance of the Resistance. At the Socialist Party Congress held in November 1944 the secretary, Mayer, declared that the Socialists wanted discussions with the Communists which would lead to working class unity. The resolution adopted by the Congress ran: "The Socialist Party desires to unite all workers by hand or brain in a single organisation. . . . It solemnly renews to the French Communist Party the offer of unity already made in the clandestine press." A committee of six was appointed to discuss

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unity with the Communist Party representatives; discussions began, but in the course of the following year the right-wing Socialists gradually drew aside.

The First Elections

It was not until October 1945 that the first elections were held, for a Constituent Assembly to draw up the Constitution. Communist Party candidates got 5,004,000 votes, heading the list. Second came the M.R.P. (Mouvement Republicain Populaire) with 4,500,000; the Socialist Party came third, with 4,191,000. The Radicals and other more or less Left groups got 2 million, about the same as the extreme Right groups.

It was at this point that the first check came to the democratic forces. The Communist Party, as the largest party in the Assembly, should have been called upon to form the Government. This was bitterly resisted by de Gaulle, whom the Assembly formally appointed Head of State and asked to form a Government. The Communist Party then proposed that a Socialist premier should be appointed, but the Socialists refused and insisted on an M.R.P. premier. So the Government was formed jointly by the M.R.P., the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Out of twenty-three Ministers, thirteen were members of the Communist and Socialist Parties.

To understand fully the part played by the right-wing Socialists, it must be recalled that Socialists and Communists together, with over 9 million votes, had an absolute majority, just over 50 per cent of the total votes polled. With the Radicals, they had nearly 54 per cent. A definitely democratic Government could have been formed, and it could have carried through the programme on which the Resistance movement had agreed—involving in the first place the democratisation of the army and the whole state apparatus, extensive nationalisation, and a really democratic Constitution.

Instead of that, the attitude of the Socialists put the M.R.P. in the leading position; and when the Constitution came to be discussed, the Socialists joined with the M.R.P. in asking for arbitrary powers for the Government, while the key point in the Communist Party's proposals was that the Government should be entirely responsible to the elected Assembly.

In spite of the fact that the Government, and the Communist members of it, succeeded in carrying through a number of necessary measures of an economic nature, including the nationalisation of the mines and the chief banks, the Socialists drew closer to the M.R.P. and away from the Communists. De Gaulle had resigned on January 20th, 1946, partly because the Communists were in the Government, partly because the so-called technicians who had been in his Provisional Government were dropped. It was said at the time that de Gaulle had hoped that his resignation would result in a deadlock, and that this might lead "to a call for the General to return on his own terms". But in fact his resignation caused not the slightest difficulty, and in a French Institute of Public Opinion poll held in March 1946, 46 per cent declared that they would not vote for a party headed by de Gaulle, as against 31 per cent who said they would support him, with the rest undecided.

The New Constitution

The draft Constitution prepared by the M.R.P. and Socialists in opposition to the Communist Party's proposals was submitted to a referendum on May 6th, 1946, and thanks to an energetic campaign against it by the Communist Party, it was turned down. A new draft had to be prepared, largely meeting the Communist standpoint, and it was adopted by a referendum on October 13th, 1946. The essential point in it is that sovereignty is vested in the French people and exercised through its elected representatives and by referendum, while Ministers are responsible solely to the elected Assembly.

Meanwhile, a further general election had been held in June 1946. The principal feature of the results was the further advance of the Communists, who got 5,203,000 votes, an increase in the Socialist vote by only 7,000, but an increase of the M.R.P. vote by a million. The Communist Party was no longer the largest party; and the Socialists and Communists together no longer had a majority.

In November 1946, after the adoption of the Constitution, there was another general election (the previous elections had been technically for the Constituent Assembly to draft the Constitution). Once again this showed a further advance for the Communist Party, with 5,476,000 votes; the Socialist vote dropped by over 700,000 to 3,454,000; and the M.R.P. vote fell by over half a million to 5,033,000: it lost votes to the outspokenly Right parties, whose vote increased by half a million. There were 183 Communist deputies, 173 M.R.P., and 104 Socialists. Once again the Communists were passed over for the premiership, but they formed the new Government with the M.R.P. and the Socialists.

The U.S.A. Takes a Hand

From this point on, however, the M.R.P. and the Socialists, encouraged by hopes of a loan from the United States, began a systematic campaign against the Communists. Already in May 1946 Blum had paid a visit to the United States, and on his return he spoke of "the remarkable disinterestedness" shown by the United States in French politics. But the American press made no

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secret of the fact that the price of aid to France would be the removal of the Communists from the Government, and it was clear that they regarded Blum as the only-too-willing instrument for this.

In the Ramadier Government formed in January 1947 Thorez was a Minister of State; and Communists also held the Ministries of Health, Labour and Reconstruction, and Defence. Internal conflict developed because of the Government's determination to open the war against the Viet Nam Liberation Movement which was to culminate in Dien Bien Phu. The Communists fought bitterly against this policy, and on the issue of credits for the war the Communist deputies voted against the Government. The Communists also fought against the policy of the Government in Madagascar, the forcible suppression of the National Liberation Movement with the massacre of 80,000, and the arrest of Madagascar M.P.s.

But it was the role of the U.S.A. that was decisive. March 1947 brought the famous "Truman doctrine", with the offer of $400 million to Greece and Turkey—qualified for aid because of their anti-communism—and the promise of economic aid to others who followed this road.

Inside France, the Right parties took up the cry, and the Socialists and M.R.P. were no less determined to qualify for United States aid by removing the Communists.

An article in the anti-Communist *Combat* on March 18th, 1947, said:

> "We depend on America. . . . The question is—how much can we get from Washington? . . . The Truman statement is a factor in the political game inside every country of the world. We knew all along that the Americans saw a threat to their own interests, and an advantage to the Soviet Union, in the progress made by *any* Communist Party in *any* country of the world, only people seldom dared to admit it openly. Now there can be no further misunderstanding."

Five days later, the same writer said that "A surgical operation is needed". At the same time, de Gaulle formed his "Rassemblement du Peuple Francais".

On May 5th, in connection with a strike at Renault's for increased wages, the Communist deputies refused to support a vote of confidence in the Government's wage-freeze policy, and the Socialist and M.R.P. members of the Government seized the opportunity. Next morning the *Journal Officiel* announced that the Communists had been excluded from the Government.

The reward for this "surgical operation" was forthcoming at once. The American press headlines screamed: "Ramadier gets rid of the Reds". And ten days later it was announced that now that the Communists were not in the Government the International Reconstruction and Development Bank, dominated by the United States, would grant France a loan of $250 million. And on June 5th the "Marshall Plan" was made public, involving a grant to France of $1,434 million.

The removal of the Communists from the Government on May 6th, 1947, was in fact the decisive turning point, from the democratic hopes of the Resistance and the period of progressive unity after the war to the rule of reaction, hopeless colonial wars, and steadily increasing subjection to the war plans of American imperialism. Immediate steps were taken by the reactionaries to reassert their grip on the state machine. With the removal of the Communists, Vichy was restored to honour. Had not Petain been a good anti-Communist? One by one the collaborators who had been sentenced were amnestied; there was a great campaign for the release of the "martyrs" like Petain. It did not take long for the Vichyites who were released from prison to become respectable and find their way back to key positions in the police, army and civil service. And it was not much longer before prominent Petainists found office in successive Governments.

As the anti-Communist campaign gathered way, the "release of the martyrs" was accompanied by purges and persecutions of the Resistance fighters, above all of the Communists who had led the Resistance. The French capitalist press campaigned against Frederic Joliot-Curie, head of the Atomic Energy Commission, and he was soon dismissed. Resistance fighters were removed from the armed forces and civil service, to make room for collaborators. The anti-Communist *Combat* commented on February 19th, 1948:

> "Not a day passes without the papers announcing sentences passed on members of the Francs-Tireurs-Partisans or of the F.F.I. for reprisals that they carried out against traitors during the Resistance or during the National Insurrection in 1944."

And on February 29th the same paper said:

> "Gradually the hated 'Fifis' [i.e., the F.F.I., the Resistance Forces] have been eliminated from the army, and are now being prosecuted by the Civil Courts."

France Cannot be Governed Without the Communist Party

It is constantly said that the instability and weakness of the French Governments since 1947 has been due to the multiplicity of parties, or to some fundamental weakness in a democratic Constitution that prevents any stable Government.

But it cannot be denied that the forces have

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always existed in France, and in the French Assembly itself, for a stable progressive Government to be formed.

The instability has come from the persistent exclusion from the Government of the Communist Party, the Party which throughout has maintained about a quarter of the total votes in general elections and consistently voices the interests of the working class. Without the Communist Party, as the leaders of the French Party have repeatedly said, France cannot be governed.

But the conditions for the exclusion of the Communists have been created and maintained by the persistent rejection by the Socialist Party, under the influence of its right-wing leaders, of every proposal for united action. Although the slogan of the right-wing Socialists has been anti-communism, this was throughout only a cover for the actual carrying through of right-wing policies that were indistinguishable from those of the capitalist parties.

That the French Communist Party, in spite of the propaganda barrage against it, maintained its position as the leading party of France is a tribute to its economic and political leadership. In the 1951 election it headed the list with 5,039,000 votes, while the Socialist vote fell to 2,764,000, and the R.P.F. (de Gaulle's party) got 4,135,000, with the M.R.P. only 2,354,000. The electoral law had been changed with the declared aim of reducing the Communist representation in the Assembly, so that while 5 million votes gave the Communists only 101 seats, the 4 million votes for the R.P.F. secured 117 seats, and the under 3 million Socialist votes won 104 seats. But the reactionaries had been unable to reduce the support given to the Party in the country.

In the statement issued after the election, the Communist Party said:

> "Thus neither slanders, provocation nor repression have succeeded, since the Communist Ministers were turned out of the Government, in weakening the decisive influence exercised by the French Communist Party. . . . The right-wing Socialist leaders bear the heavy responsibility of having, by their alliances and their whole policy, assisted the formation in the new Assembly of a majority determined to bring to power an openly reactionary and pro-fascist Government." Unity of action of all French people of good will can and must "create the conditions to prepare for the coming to power of a Government of progress, a democratic and truly national Government, a Government of peace."

In the outcome, the steady struggle of the organised workers to maintain their position in face of continuously rising prices, the opposition to the war in Viet Nam and the crisis of Dien Bien Phu, the liberation struggle of the North African peoples and the armed uprising of the Algerian National Liberation Movement in the autumn of 1954, and the long struggle against the rearming of Germany (in which at one time the progressive majority asserted itself), made it impossible for any reactionary Government to survive. Government crises occurred every few months, and Algeria became more and more the central issue in the whole political situation in France. In the eight years from 1947 to 1955, there were sixteen Government crises. The Governments changed, but the same policy was carried on.

At the end of 1955, with a general election in the near future unavoidable, the reactionary majority in the Assembly tried to find some form of electoral law that would deprive the Communists of effective representation, but they could not agree on any measure, and the elections had to be held on the law used in 1951, which it was hoped would be partially effective against the Communists. But in fact the law worked, if anything, to the advantage of the Communists, because their position in a large number of constituencies was overwhelming.

In the general election held on January 2nd, 1956, the Communist Party once again headed the list with 5,623,000 votes, with 151 seats. The Socialists came next with 3,188,000, with 94 seats.

The Communist Party once more proposed to the Socialist and Radical Parties the formation of a joint Socialist-Radical-Communist Government—which between them had an absolute majority in the Assembly. The programme suggested was "a peaceful solution to the problems of Algeria through negotiation"; improvement of the living conditions of the workers and peasants; an international policy leading to general disarmament.

Before the election, the National Council of the French Socialist Party had turned down a fresh Communist Party appeal for unity, though only by 1,979 to 1,243. But the Communist Party's insistence that there was no solution to the Algerian problem but recognition of the fact of Algerian nationality, and that negotiations on this basis should be started immediately, found wide support among both Socialists and Radicals.

Mollet Repudiates His Pledge

But the Government that was actually formed was a Socialist-Radical Government under Mollet. In his policy statement, Mollet pledged the Government to find a rapid and peaceful solution to the Algerian war, and was supported by the Communist deputies on this basis. Mollet actually removed Soustelle from control of Algeria, and went to Algiers himself on February 6th, declaring before he left Paris that "the will of the French Government, its essential task, is that no more blood should flow in Algeria". But when he reached Algiers the reactionary French settlers organised a

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hostile reception, and Mollet capitulated. He returned to France to speak only of carrying on the war; more and more soldiers were sent to Algeria; more and more war credits were demanded.

Thus once again the Socialist refusal of unity with the Communists put the Socialist Party at the mercy of the reactionaries; the policy on which the Mollet Government had been formed was repudiated, and the Right parties began to get more confident. In May, Mendès-France resigned from Mollet's Government because of his opposition to its Algerian policy; later that month Mollet was defeated on his taxation proposals and resigned. Then came the Bourgès-Maunoury Government, which lasted from May to September 1957; Gaillard was next, and he was succeeded by Pflimlin. The crisis continued, because Mollet had closed the door to a peaceful settlement in Algeria, and the continued war was increasing the economic difficulties of France. All the time the settlers in Algeria and the Right in France were demanding special powers for the Government to increase its repression of the Algerian people. In the Assembly on July 16th, 1957, when such a Bill was under discussion, Duclos said:

> "It may give pleasure to a reactionary to see democratic liberties trodden underfoot—that is understandable; but those who are charged with the safeguarding of these liberties cannot but be uneasy. They cannot fail to see that the carrying on of the Algerian war takes on more and more the character of an enterprise directed not only against the right of the Algerian people to independence, but also against the French people's right to liberty."

When the discussion on a similar Bill was before the Assembly in March 1958 there was an organised police demonstration led by fascists. On March 14th the Political Committee of the French Communist Party issued a statement warning against the fascist danger, particularly referring to the fact that, owing to the Government's complacency, fascists had secured "important posts in the police and in the army". Once more the appeal to Republicans to unite their forces to resist the advance of reaction was made; but it fell on deaf ears.

Whether *The Times* story that the nucleus of the rebel group of officers in Algiers was formed after Dien Bien Phu to "restore France's prestige" is true or not, there should be no misunderstanding of the nature of the rebellion. It was organised not by any kind of French "patriots" but by the most reactionary sections of the French bourgeoisie; and its aim was not only to retain control of Algeria but to destroy democracy in France.

The story of how a 3 to 1 majority in the Assembly against de Gaulle was converted into a majority for de Gaulle, and the part played by Mollet and other right-wing Socialists in this, has been told elsewhere.

Parallels have been drawn with the Franco rebellion in Spain, with Mussolini's and Hitler's advent to power. But the differences outweigh the similarities. It is true that the persistent refusal of unity by the Socialists has allowed the advance of reaction. It is true that Franco used Morocco as the base for his attack on Spain, as the rebels intended to use Algeria as the base for the attack on France. But the big difference is this: 1958 is not the 1930s. There is no organised fascist force in France; though the so-called Committees of Public Safety are intended to develop such a force. The French working class is organised and active, and the leadership is acknowledged to be the Communist Party. The tremendous anti-fascist and Republican feeling has been demonstrated all over France.

In its declaration of June 3rd, 1958, the Political Bureau of the French Communist Party has expressed its view of the present position. With de Gaulle's installation, it says, France enters a new stage of struggle for the Republic. There can be no underestimation of the gravity of the situation. "But the forces exist to bar the road to fascism and to put a check to the exercise of personal power." Deputies of several parties, including a number of Socialists and Radicals, had refused to accept de Gaulle. "In the country, men and women of all shades of opinion, Communists, Radicals, Catholics, workers, peasants, students, leading intellectuals, have united to safeguard the liberties of the people." The demonstrations have created the conditions for a new advance of the democratic forces. All anti-fascists should set up in factories, towns and villages Committees of Republican Defence, democratically elected.

The Communist Party's appeal for unity in the fight against de Gaulle has already received a great response from the people. What is certain is that de Gaulle cannot solve any of the problems facing France, either the Algerian war or the terrible inflation that has resulted from war policies. The fight against the personal dictatorship is in essence a fight for a united progressive Government and a policy of peace in Algeria, the improvement of conditions in France, and international agreement.

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The Working Class Party

John Mahon

THE working people face serious problems—American domination of British policy; great danger of nuclear war; oncoming economic crisis; the increasing instability of the economy arising from the disintegration of the empire. They see increasing conflict and confusion all over the capitalist world, dominated by war preparations.

In contrast they also see the Socialist countries, united around a peace policy, advancing their productive power and standards of life in planned cohesion. The scientific achievements of the Soviet Union, following her military achievements against Hitler, inspire the people.

The feeling grows that Britain's future is now at stake.

Two political parties, Communist and Labour, place differing views and policies before the working people. How are they to decide between them?

What is required from a political party to express the interests of the working class today and in the future? To answer requires an estimate of the situation and the perspective.

Britain's economy, standards of life and existence as a great power depend on her relations with the outside world. The imperialist pattern of these relations, built up in 150 years of capitalism, is now losing its material basis. With machine produced commodities, investment of finance capital and aggressive colonial wars, the British capitalists gained political control of an empire in which they exploited some 600 million people. Now the great majority of these are politically independent, and those who remain soon will be. This means for British capitalism the increasing loss of cheap raw materials, cheap food, protected markets and politically controlled fields of very profitable investment.

Priority in capitalist production, command of the seas, the resources of empire, enabled Britain to become foremost among the imperialist powers, to make advantageous alliances, and secure high profits from imperialist wars.

Today the United States of America has overwhelming productive, financial, naval and military superiority in the capitalist world. Today a major war would mean for Britain destruction by nuclear weapons.

Taken in total, these changes deprive Britain of the basis for acting as a first-rank imperialist power. Further, they raise the question, increasingly urgent as decline continues, of whether she can remain an imperialist power. If so, how? If not, what is the alternative?

The capitalist class does not possess the resources required to regain its dominant position. It recognised this when it became America's junior partner in an "alliance" on terms which gave America the advantages. It hoped by this "alliance" to gain time and strength to defeat the national liberation movement. It failed to do so. The Suez adventure was then undertaken in an attempt to reconquer by armed force people who had escaped from the orbit of British imperialism. That failed too, and the failure underlined the impossibility of returning to the old imperialist way in face of the new alignment of world forces.

The capitalist class hoped by this "alliance" to intimidate the Soviet Union, prevent the further advance of Socialism, and make successful war on the Socialist countries. But the Korean war showed the limitations of American strength, and subsequent scientific advances in the Soviet Union have made clear the futility of hopes to wage successful war upon her.

To continue the present "alliance" means that Britain becomes a sort of Portugal, imperialist to a few remaining colonies held by force, colonial herself in relation to the dominant American power.

Whether the prospect be the hopeless struggle to build up strength for imperialist action independent of America, or to pay her the tribute arising from growing dependence, the capitalist class is driven to a great increase of the exploitation of the workers. The cost of nuclear weapons, of deployment of military forces whether in obedience to American orders or for colonial adventures, the accumulation of resources for colonial or foreign investment, the sustaining of interest and profit payments as economic crisis advances—this requires an all-round capitalist offensive on the standards of life and social gains secured by the workers in decades of struggle.

It is not merely a matter of freezing wages at their present, inadequate level. It is a matter of heavy reductions in real wages, the impoverishment of millions.

Capitalism can offer nothing else.

Because the change from capitalism to Socialism is now on the order of the day, the claim of any party to the allegiance of the working class must be tested by its attitude to Socialism.

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Socialism

The Communist Party makes clear in its Constitution that its aim is Socialism and that its activity is directed to developing the necessary consciousness, strength and unity of the working class to achieve Socialism. In its programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, it explains precisely what it means by Socialism, its perspective for the working class to attain political power, and its proposals for what a Socialist Government should do. It shows the relationship of the day to day struggles with the struggle for the aim of political power. All these matters are continuously dealt with in the educational and propagandist work of the Party. No one can doubt that the Communist Party is for Socialism and for the ending of capitalism.

What is the position of the Labour Party?

The objects of the Labour Party include:

> "4. To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.
>
> "5. Generally to promote the political, social and economic emancipation of the people and more particularly of those who depend directly upon their own exertions by hand or by brain for the means of life."

This can be interpreted as meaning that the aim is Socialism. But it is vague and can be otherwise interpreted. "Common ownership" might mean ownership by the common people, or a form of ownership in which the people and the capitalists participate. It does not declare the necessity of ending the exploitation of labour by capitalists.

The formula was inserted in 1918, under the influence of the Russian Revolution. Previously only Parliamentary representation was spoken of. The formula was ambiguous because while many of the rank and file meant the aim to be Socialism, the social-democratic leadership did not.

There is no official document of the Annual Conference or the Executive Committee which defines what the Labour Party means by Socialism, or how it is to be realised. The Labour Party has no Socialist programme.

What it has is a series of programmes each prepared for a general election at a given date. Naturally, the proposals vary from election to election. They include many reforms, some of which have been achieved by Labour Governments. Some considerably benefit the workers, some are of political importance. But they do not constitute a programme for Socialism, for they nowhere propose to abolish capitalist exploitation of labour. They are all measures of reform of the capitalist system.

Let us turn from documents to the practice of the Labour Government of 1945-50. Did it seek to break with capitalism, to move towards Socialism?

In accord with the programme on which it was elected, the Labour Government nationalised coal, transport, gas, electricity and steel. Many Labour workers expected that nationalisation would mean the ending of private profit, better wages for the workers and better service for the people. But Labour's Nationalisation Acts kept up the burden of profits for private capital, in some industries increased it. This is capitalist, not socialist, nationalisation.

Some Labour spokesmen refer to a "mixed economy" with the nationalised industries as a "socialist sector". But a socialist sector means a sector in which the exploitation of labour by capitalists has been ended. That is not the case in the nationalised industries; the capitalists each year get millions of pounds from them. In point of fact, it is impossible to have a socialist sector without the working class having political power.

In foreign affairs the Labour Government followed the lead of Churchill's infamous Fulton speech. It put itself at the head of the "cold war" against the Socialist countries. It made British policy subservient to the demands of the Americans, and gave them permanent bases on British soil.

In the empire the Labour Government maintained British domination by using armed force against the national liberation movements wherever it felt strong enough to do so. It only conceded political independence where, as in India, a war was beyond its resources.

Thus the Labour Government interpreted its election programme in reforms designed to strengthen capitalism. That capitalism was strengthened was shown by the return of Tory Governments in 1951 and 1955. The result of Labour rule was to turn a Labour majority into a Tory majority.

These developments flowed from the theory of the dominant social-democratic leaders. The state neutral and above classes, the gradual progressive evolution of capitalism, foreign policy above parties, empire necessary to maintain living standards—these are their themes, leading in practice to the acceptance and defence of capitalism and opposition to socialist revolution.

The idea of "common ownership" is by them expressed in capitalist nationalisation, and later in the state purchase of shares in capitalist companies, as proposed in *Industry and Society*, which means the formal acceptance of capitalism.

To win acceptance of this theory, the social-democratic leaders are continually proclaiming that capitalism has "changed". Events as continually prove them wrong.

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The effort of the I.L.P. leaders in the late twenties to prove that "Ford had outdated Marx" preceded the economic blizzard of the early thirties. In recent years Crossman has told us that there are only "vestigial remnants" of the capitalist class and the proletariat, and Strachey tells us that capitalism has overcome its instability.

The American depression, the emergence of unemployment in Britain, the advance of dictatorship in France, show the unreality of these theories.

Against social-democratic illusions, the reality of capitalism in crisis asserts itself and today's developments pose Socialism as the solution to Britain's problems more clearly than ever before. That is why the working class needs a party based on Socialist ideology, with a clear Socialist programme and perspective. The Communist Party is that Party, but to achieve Socialism the mass Labour movement, including the Labour Party, must be won for the aim of Socialism.

Political Power

Because Socialism means ending capitalist exploitation of labour, the capitalist class will always use their political power to prevent it. To make Socialism possible the working class has to end capitalist power and put in its place the power of the working people. Such a change of class power means a revolution. The capitalists will not voluntarily give up power; the working class will have to take it from them.

The problems facing the working class in achieving power arise from the nature of capitalist rule, which is in essence dictatorial, for it consists in imposing exploitation on millions for the benefit of a few. The main bastions of capitalist rule are: ownership and control, directly or indirectly, of the productive and financial resources of the country; control of the state machine, the legislative power to legalise their exploitation of labour, and the executive power of regulation and armed force; the vast propaganda machine, including press and radio, through which a daily struggle is waged to form the opinions of the people.

In order to rule, the working class has to establish a Socialist Government, expropriate the big capitalists, put the controlling positions in the state machine in the hands of those loyal to Socialism, ensure democratic ownership of the press and people's control of the radio. By such measures a Socialist Government will consolidate working class power and end the political, economic and social power of the capitalist class.

The Communist Party considers that the main purpose of the working class party is to develop the day-to-day struggle so as to realise the necessary social and political conditions for the working class to bring about this great change.

In the day-to-day struggle the workers find that the capitalist class uses its political power to wage class struggle and maintain its rule. The Party can therefore, in the course of helping the workers to develop united action for their demands, also develop understanding that political power is class power, and that the working class needs it to advance its class interest.

The Labour Party in its Objects speaks only of maintaining "in Parliament and in the country a political Labour Party" and of co-operating with the General Council of the T.U.C. "in harmony with the Party constitution and objects".

The whole emphasis of the social-democratic leaders is to persuade the workers that political power is the same thing as a Parliamentary majority, that Parliament controls the state, and that any attempt to bring extra-Parliamentary pressure on the Government by direct action is undemocratic. When Mosley's blackshirts were on the march, the social-democratic leaders advised the workers "to stay at home".

The social-democratic view is that democracy in the political struggle means voting when the time comes, that in between elections the workers should "leave it to the M.P.s" and prepare for the next election.

The political effects of these different views may be seen in relation to the present capitalist offensive.

All the capitalist resources are used to further their class aim—reduction of workers' living standards. The Government helped to raise prices and increase rents, and cut social services. It imposed credit squeeze and high interest rates. The big employers' organisations demanded further measures, a halt to wage increases, intensification of labour, considerable unemployment and the curbing of the trade unions. The Government set up the Cohen Committee, proclaimed a wage freeze essential to the national economy, through its Ministers overturned decisions of the wage negotiating machinery, and sacked thousands from its own workshops.

It directly influenced the events in the wage negotiations on British Railways and London Transport, intervening continuously while verbally refusing to do so, for the dual purpose of tying rail wage increases to union acceptance of lower earnings and redundancy, and of isolating the strike of the London busmen, making clear its readiness to use troops if the strike were extended. Each day the capitalist press and the radio did their utmost in a variety of ways to win public opinion for the capitalist policy. All this is the exercise of State and political power by the capitalist class.

The Communist Party is devoting itself to the development of united resistance to the capitalist offensive. Its Executive Committee discusses the

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problems and publishes its materials. A call for solidarity with the strikers resulted in a great wave of meetings, leaflets and activity by the Party members.

The Communist Party declares that the working class is capable of defeating the capitalist offensive and going over to the counter-attack. This requires the united action of all working class forces, solidarity with any section in struggle, trade union unity in place of sectionalism, the compelling of a general election and the return of a Labour majority pledged to a progressive policy. But even then the capitalist class would still have political, economic and social class power, and it would be necessary for the working class to carry the struggle to a new stage of a socialist majority and working class power.

The Labour Party has neither given political leadership nor entered the struggle against the capitalist offensive. Its Parliamentary action has been extremely weak, its leaders have in speeches accepted the capitalist idea of the necessity of wage freeze, and declared that a Labour Government would bring it about in agreement with the trade unions. No alternative policy has been adopted by the Labour Party and no effort is being made to hasten the next General Election.

The Labour Party considers that the industrial aspect of the struggle is a purely trade union matter. It makes no protest at the T.U.C. intervention to isolate the busmen, does nothing to help overcome the sectionalism which hampers the trade union struggle.

Party Organisation

A political party develops the organisation required to attain its aims. The Communist Party, seeing its task as the leadership of the working class in the daily struggle, so as to make possible the achievement of power and the Socialist revolution, requires an organisation capable of continuous activity and leadership, and able to act as a unified force. It effects this by combining a centralised leadership with a network of basic units striving for political leadership in workplaces and localities. The organisation is animated by the revolutionary theory common to all members and by political discussion of all current problems. The Party's programme, political statements, topical publications and Marxist classics make it possible for all interested to see its position on all aspects of the class struggle. The National Congress is the supreme authority.

The Labour Party, seeing Parliament as the main field, limits its organisation to electoral functions. The purpose of the Constituency Parties is primarily to bring electors to the poll. Absence of a common theory makes possible a variety of views, sometimes contradictory, sometimes leading to internal conflict at critical times. The social-democratic theories which animate the dominant leadership are not submitted for decision to the membership. The Parliamentary Group is not subordinate to the National Conference, and the Labour Government is not bound by Conference decisions.

How Can the Labour Party be Changed?

Clearly it is necessary, if the working class is to unite its forces and achieve political power, for the policy of the Labour Party to be changed. How is this to be done?

Some of those who want to see the Labour Party adopt a Socialist policy call upon Communists to leave the Communist Party and join the Labour Party. They argue that because the Labour Party has millions of members and supporters, a revolutionary party is not needed, that the duty of revolutionary socialists is to join the Labour Party.

If this advice were followed, it would mean the liquidation of the Communist Party, a wish often expressed by the right-wing leaders. Sometimes it is suggested that instead of the Communist Party, there should be an organisation affiliated to the Labour Party to conduct Socialist education.

The social-democratic leadership imposed the bans on Communists in order to prevent revolutionary socialist views and activity inside the Labour Party. The Executive does not tolerate individuals, and would certainly not tolerate an organisation, which it considers engages in such activity.

To change Labour policy from reformist to Socialist and to make corresponding changes in the constitution and the leadership would require the majority vote at the Annual Conference, where the trade unions hold the decisive voting power. To get such a majority would require a great political advance by the organised workers in industry. This in turn requires the mass propaganda of Socialist ideas and the experience of united action in the struggle against capitalist policy.

Where is this to come from, on the scale required?

The Executive always attack every attempt to carry on such mass work by individuals whether on a local level or in Parliament. It expelled D. N. Pritt, M.P., and others. It has expelled Labour councillors who voted against differential rents or rent increases.

There is only one source for the propaganda and leadership necessary to bring a great Socialist advance—a Communist Party. Individual effort, however sincere, cannot substitute for the work of the Party. Open, public campaigning is needed; the work cannot be limited to committees.

So far from the liquidation of the Communist Party helping to change the Labour Party, the very opposite is true. The stronger the Communist Party, the greater its activity, the wider its industrial influence, the greater will be the impact of Socialist

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ideas on the affiliated organisations of the Labour Party, and the greater the possibilities of success for the work of the militants in the Constituency Labour Parties.

It is no longer correct to regard the Labour Party as "a federal structure embracing all working class organisations". True, the founders had in mind a Labour Party accepting into affiliation all working class and Socialist organisations and thus becoming the electoral united party of the working class.

In its first stage Marxist delegates could come from direct affiliation or through trade unions, and use their powers of persuasion in discussion on policy, selection of candidates, election of leaders.

The first world war and the Russian Revolution sharpened the differences in the Labour Party. When the Communist Party, formed in 1920, applied for affiliation, it was refused. Later all Communists were excluded by refusing individual membership and depriving the trade unions of the right to send Communists as delegates.

Today the Labour Party, while basing itself on the organised workers, excludes the Communists, the revolutionary section of the working class. This exclusion was instigated by the social-democratic leadership but has been endorsed by several annual conferences. Large numbers of Labour Party members have never heard the Communist view.

To defeat the social-democratic leaders, entrenched as they are today, it is necessary to bring about a far-reaching change in the political views of the mass of affiliated members, and make possible an alliance of progressive trade unions and Constituency Labour Parties growing strong enough to become the majority at the Annual Conference. The political work of the Communist Party in the factories and trade unions is an indispensable contribution to this development.

The Communist Party has its Socialist programme, which has emerged from the Party's experience of class struggle, its Marxist theory, and its study of British traditions and institutions. To be realised the programme has to become the aim of the organised Labour movement.

Since its formation the Communist Party has rendered indispensable service to the working class and has been in the forefront of every struggle. To render the greatest service of all, leadership in the conquest of political power and the building of Socialism, the Communist Party must become a mass party.

The situation today favours the growth of the Communist Party, and the decisions of the 25th Congress said what has to be done. Events have proved the correctness of the Congress forecast of intensified crisis and war danger, of Tory offensive, and the rising struggle of the working people.

What is now needed is for the whole Party to become active in public and in the Labour movement, presenting the Communist policy and programme to the people. The open political combat with the ideas of capitalism and social democracy is the best way to win support, alongside the greatest immediate struggle on all the day-to-day issues.

The factories and the industrial areas are most favourable for the growth of the Party. Communists in the factories and trade unions frequently win the confidence of the workers and are elected to responsible positions.

The electoral field affords the greatest opportunity to explain the policy and role of the Party. The whole struggle of the working class will be advanced if wider Communist representation can be gained on the councils and Communist M.P.s returned to Parliament. The time has come for every branch of the Party to make up its mind to work among the people so that it can enter the local elections with Communist candidates.

In conclusion, I should like to recall what the Political Resolution of our 25th Party Congress said:

> "The British Labour movement is the oldest in the world, and the most powerful and well organised of any capitalist country. But its strength is not fully used in the interests of the workers and the fight for Socialism because of the influence of the right-wing ideas that arise out of the historical development of imperialism. A condition for the advance of the Labour movement, therefore, is the struggle against capitalist ideas and for the victory of Marxist ideas. Guided by Marxist ideas and principles the great mass organisations of the British working class would be invincible."

The next number of "Marxism Today", August, will carry an important article by Harry Pollitt on the problems facing the trade union movement in Britain.

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The Pound and the Sterling Area

Leonard Thomas

> "Sometimes it has been a balance of payments crisis and sometimes it has been an exchange crisis, but always it has been a crisis. . . . It is a picture of a nation in full retreat from its responsibilities. That is not the path to greatness. It is the road to ruin."

THUS Mr. Thorneycroft, in the House of Commons on January 23rd of this year, and his general estimate is in no way exaggerated. The monotonous recurrence of the crisis, in 1947, 1949, 1951, 1955, 1956 and 1957, in spite of all the "remedies" applied, shows that it is deep-seated and of a permanent character. In fact it sums up in a very sharp form the whole general crisis of British imperialism, and its origins can be traced back right to the First World War.

The "Golden Era" of the Pound

Up to 1914 the pound was the strongest currency in the world, the international money *par excellence*. It rested on the strength of British capital, of British imperialism, and assumed a dominating role corresponding to the position of Britain as the centre of the developing international capitalist economy. Sterling crowned an edifice of economic power based on Britain's development as "the workshop of the world", on her vast foreign trade and merchant marine, on the concentration in London of international banking facilities and the money market, insurance, the commodity markets etc., and finally on Britain's position as the metropolis of the mighty British Empire.

The overseas operations of British capitalism—trade, foreign investment and so on—would in any case have assured an important position for sterling. But in addition the City of London was able to get into its own hands the financing of much international trade that never touched Britain's shores at all. Since sterling was the leading medium for international payments, this meant that foreigners left money here for the settlement of accounts, and funds were likewise attracted to London by the opportunities for profitable employment in the highly organised money market here. Along with the short-term financing business there developed the highly important long-term export of capital.

The pound was fully convertible into other currencies and into gold, but in fact only a small gold reserve was kept in London. Sterling enjoyed confidence, it rested on the huge and constantly mounting funds and other assets of British capital. The coming or going of the money of one foreign country or another was of little account when the general position of sterling not only appeared to be so strong but rested in truth on such broad economic foundations.

The field of operations of the pound was the globe itself, but within this domain it had already a special "inner keep"—the British Empire, and here sterling had secured a grip like a vice. Sterling was in essence the currency of the whole of the Empire, the local moneys being merely different varieties of the pound. The banking system of the Empire was simply an overseas extension of the British banking network, with head offices in London. Conducting all their foreign trade in sterling, the countries of the Empire kept their foreign exchange reserves in London, in sterling, and settled all their accounts through London. It is from this "inner keep" of the pound that has developed in time the present Sterling Area.

The Decline of the Pound

The First World War put an end to this "Golden Era". Indeed long before 1914 the deepest foundation of the pound's domination was weakened when Britain lost her monopoly as the world's manufacturer and was overtaken by rivals in this field. The consequent turn by the bourgeoisie to the enlargement and more systematic exploitation of the Empire partly compensated for this loss, but the simultaneous development of rival imperialisms, by the same token, encroached on the pound's world domain. Imperialism also imposed new handicaps on Britain's lagging productive economy, by diverting economic resources into military channels, and through the export of capital at the expense of needed investment at home. Britain's economy became more parasitical, as the profits from overseas investment began to replace the export of goods as a means of paying for imports.

Imperialism too bred its own grave-diggers, the

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peoples of the oppressed countries, and by an inexorable logic, prepared the way for the victory of its own successor as a social system, first in Russia in 1917 and then on a broader and broader scale throughout the world.

The inter-imperialist rivalry was fought out in the catastrophic death and destruction of the First World War. British imperialism vanquished its German rival, only to find itself in 1919 challenged by another and vastly strengthened adversary in U.S. imperialism. Since that time the pound has had to fight a constant battle against its basically more powerful rival, the U.S. dollar. The more British capital has lost ground as an actual producer, and as a political and military force, the more tenaciously has it sought to maintain the position of London as a world financial centre, and with it the status of the pound as an international currency, the instrument and the symbol of financial power.

Following the First World War, reckless of the consequences for Britain's productive economy, even for her exports, the pound was made "to look the dollar in the eye" in 1925. It was put back to its old pre-war exchange parity, and again made convertible into gold. This certainly re-asserted the position of the City of London as an international banker. As concerns also overseas investment, British capital made good within a decade the loss of the one quarter of its foreign assets sustained during the war. But even in purely financial terms, the position was inherently unstable, since London was now at the mercy of "hot money" which no longer rested confidently here, but was for ever fleeing from one financial centre to another. In more basic economic terms, moreover, the artificial overvaluation of the pound involved deflation and the restriction of production at home, the overpricing of British exports, and the neglect of investment at home in order to export capital abroad.

The illusion of maintaining the international status of the pound on the basis of a depressed and weakening home economy was shattered by the world economic crisis of the 'thirties. In 1931 the retreat was sounded, the Gold Standard abandoned, and the pound left to find its own value in relation to other currencies, save for the manipulations of the exchange control authorities. The formal unity of the international capitalist economy was split asunder, and bitter economic warfare broke out with the weapons of exchange controls, new tariff barriers to trade, and so on. The abandonment by the U.K. of the Gold Standard broke up the unity of the international monetary system, and a number of separate currency blocs appeared.

Partly because of the severity of the depression in the U.S.A., the currency bloc formed round the pound, the Sterling Bloc, proved to be the most successful. This Bloc incorporated, naturally, the "inner keep" of the pound, the Empire, though Canada slipped out of the pound's clutches into those of the U.S. dollar. In addition a substantial and growing number of other countries outside the Empire were to be counted, to a greater or lesser degree, as members of the Sterling Bloc. What the members of the Bloc had particularly in common was the abandonment of the Gold Standard, the tying of the value of their currencies to the pound, the holding of reserves in London, and the utilisation of sterling in their international transactions. The members outside the Empire were drawn in partly by economic ties with Britain, partly by the technical convenience of associating their moneys with the pound. Off gold, sterling could no longer pretend to the position of standard for all the world, but it remained the standard for a large part of it.

The Sterling Area

The Second World War broke up the Sterling Bloc as such, since the countries outside the Empire cut their currencies loose from the pound, and withdrew their money from London. What remained was the Empire, always less Canada, and this was now welded into a tightly organised Sterling Area. Externally, the purpose of the Sterling Area was to impose financial controls on all transactions between the Empire and the rest of the world, along with import controls etc., so as to secure the full mobilisation of economic resources for the war. While in general payments within the Sterling Area remained free, payments to the rest of the world could be made only with the permission of the exchange control which was set up in Britain and the other countries of the Area. Along with this went the pooling in London of all gold and foreign exchange (notably dollar) earnings, which were doled out only as dictated by war needs. As a counterpart to the gold and foreign exchange they turned in to the pool, the overseas Sterling Area countries were credited with sterling in London. In addition, however, their sterling holdings (and those of some other countries) mounted rapidly because the British Government "bought" from them goods and services needed for the war, and paid in sterling which, for the most part, could neither be employed to buy British goods nor converted into gold or other currencies. Since even this drastic financial mobilisation proved quite inadequate, the U.K. had also to rely on Lend-Lease to sustain its economy and the war effort.

Post-war Situation

Apart from its more general economic losses, British imperialism emerged from the war with U.K. exports cut to the bone, and dependent on

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Lend-Lease to provide needed imports. The pound had, it is true, a veritable fortress in the Sterling Area, but even here the control of imperialism was increasingly menaced by the forces of national liberation and the new urge for independent national economic development, and outside the Area virtually nothing remained of the pound's old field of activity. In addition, where before the war there had been an average of some £700 million held by overseas countries in London as working balances etc., there were now debts of £3,694 million. Worse still, before the war the gold and dollar reserve had been big enough, if necessary, to pay off every penny of the £700 million, but by 1945 it covered only a quarter of the debts.

The crises of the pound stem from the attempt by British imperialism not just to maintain itself but to regain its positions as an international banker and long-term investor.

Convertibility

Here a complex struggle has taken place between British and American imperialism. Promptly after the war, the U.S.A. profited by its stranglehold on Britain, cancelled Lend-Lease, and offered instead a special loan. The condition of this loan was that the pound be made convertible, because unconvertible pounds in the hands of Sterling Area and other countries cannot be spent on dollar goods and services. While aiming thus to prise open the pound's inner keep, the U.S.A. also attacked the system of Imperial Tariff Preference, since this equally discriminates against U.S. goods, and the U.K. had to agree, under the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, not to increase existing preferences.

In 1947 Britain duly made the pound convertible, but had promptly to annul this decision, since the holders of the sterling balances immediately started cashing in on the gold and dollar reserves which threatened to disappear entirely as a result. Partly under continued U.S. pressure, but more fundamentally for its own ends, the British bourgeoisie has, however, since that time, evolved a system of convertibility suited to its own purposes.

Thus the Sterling Area organisation and general mode of operation has been preserved, though such countries as Egypt have withdrawn, though endless shifts and manoeuvres are necessary to maintain the Area in a form suited to the purposes of imperialism.

Not surprisingly, sterling held by residents of the Dollar Area has always been convertible. But for the rest of the world, the non-pound, non-dollar countries, a new type of pound has been created, transferable sterling. On receiving such sterling, for example as payment for exports to the U.K., a "transferable account" country can use it not only for payments to the U.K., or any other Sterling Area country, but equally to pay another transferable account country. The more such sterling circulates from one country to another—that is, from one country's account in London to another—the more the business for the City of London. The U.K. had not intended that this transferable sterling should be converted into dollars, i.e. used for payments to the Dollar Area, but in practice it proved impossible to prevent precisely such operations taking place in Zurich and other financial centres, though they are not allowed in London. Zurich in this way is taking business away from London, and there is now speculation as to when such business will be brought back to London by making this transferable sterling fully and officially convertible.

Whatever the precise truth of the oft-repeated claim that 40-50 per cent of the world's trade is now financed in sterling, there is no doubt that the pound has been restored to a major position as an international currency alongside the dollar. But this is the kernel of the problem of the pound as an international money: that it has recaptured world status, while remaining fundamentally weak and crisis-ridden. It mirrors exactly the continued pretensions of British imperialism to its old place in the world, despite its weakening and decay.

This, however, describes merely the general situation of the pound. It is necessary to analyse the problem in greater detail.

The U.K. Current Balance of Payments

In one field there was, at least up to 1955, a genuine if still limited and precarious improvement in the international economic position of the U.K. as compared with pre-war. With one interruption, in 1952, industrial production increased after the war, and in 1955 reached a level about 50 per cent above 1938. This larger production was accompanied by a doubling of the volume of exports. Since the volume of imports has increased by only around 10 per cent, by 1956 and 1957 exports (valued f.o.b.) were paying for about 98 per cent of imports (f.o.b.), as compared with only 64 per cent in 1938. This has made it possible to bring the *current* balance of payments (trade, shipping, profit receipts and payments and other "invisibles") not just into equilibrium but indeed into surplus. Leaving aside the two immediate post-war years, there have, in fact, been surpluses in all save two years, and from 1952 to 1957 the net cumulative surplus was £1,099 million. The importance of these overall surpluses should not be underestimated, but they have not been sufficient to stabilise the pound. To understand why, it is necessary firstly to examine the U.K.'s balance of payments more closely.

Within the overall surplus of the U.K. there is on the one side a very large surplus with the Sterling

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Area, but on the other side a deficit with the Dollar Area, and more generally the non-sterling world as a whole. This deficit would very quickly drain away the gold and dollar reserve, were it not for the fact that the Sterling Area turns in, to the U.K. gold and dollar reserve, its gold production and its net surplus of non-sterling foreign exchange earned with the non-sterling world. This gold and foreign exchange "contribution" is not always, however, as large as the U.K. non-sterling deficit. During the second half of 1957, for example, the fall in the prices of many Sterling Area exports as a result of the American recession meant that the Sterling Area was on balance drawing gold and dollars from the reserves, along with the U.K. This aggravated the situation of the pound, though it was not the direct cause of the sterling crisis of 1957. In addition, however, to such ill effects on the pound of economic difficulties in the U.S.A. and other capitalist countries, the position of sterling also becomes more vulnerable as the U.K.'s control over the trade and foreign exchange, notably of such "dollar-earning" Sterling Area countries as Ghana and Malaya, grows weaker.

On top of this source of weakness of the pound is overlaid the instability arising from the "international banking" functions of the City of London. As stated, the U.K.'s overseas sterling liabilities rose from £700 million before the war to £3,694 million in 1945. By the end of 1957 these had been but little reduced, to £3,267 million (indeed, the figure was £3,912 million if we include the debt to the International Monetary Fund). The position is unstable because against this huge volume of debt there are only small gold and dollar reserves. Any renewed loss of confidence in sterling therefore tends to produce a crisis, as the holders of sterling rush to get their money out of London, and so automatically run down the small reserves. But of course the repayment of debts shows no profit, and moreover the maintenance of the international banking role of the City means precisely the keeping of sterling balances by other countries in London.

It is now claimed that the position is rather more stable, because the non-sterling countries have reduced their holdings in London, by the simple process of only bringing back a part of the money withdrawn at each sterling crisis. It is argued that the Sterling Area balances are easier to keep under control. But it must first of all be noted that one of the purposes, and the effects, of the 7 per cent Bank Rate was to bring foreign funds back to London.

Sterling Balances

As regards the Sterling Area, the politically independent countries have, in total, somewhat reduced their balances. The grand total of the sterling balances has, however, been kept close to the original 1945 figure by the approximate trebling of the debts owed to the Colonies, from £454 million in 1945 to £1,309 million in June 1957. In effect, forced loans have been raised from the Colonies through the "normal" operation of the financial arrangements tying those countries to the U.K. But here again there is no permanent stability, and the accession to political independence of Ghana and Malaya, both large holders of sterling, raises new gloomy forebodings among the financial pundits.

Imperialism has not chosen to reduce the sterling debts by using balance of payments surpluses to this end, nor has it undertaken any substantial and permanent building-up of the gold and dollar reserves. It is indeed a remarkable fact that even with the recent increase in the reserves, they still represent only about half of the dollars borrowed by the British Government since the end of the war through the post-war U.S. and Canadian loans, the European Recovery Programme loans, the 1956 loan from the International Monetary Fund, and the 1957 loan from the U.S. Export-Import Bank. Balance of payments surpluses and new dollar debts notwithstanding, this famous "international banker" is as insolvent as ever, and can apparently even now think of only one possible solution, another dollar loan.

But he has had the money, the payments surpluses and the dollar loans. What then has he done with it? Here we turn to the second international financial activity of imperialism, the export of capital. It is estimated that from 1952 to 1957 the export of capital from the U.K. absorbed nearly the whole of the balance of payments surplus earned in that period. Like the international banking role, the export of capital is extremely profitable to the finance-capitalists, and adds to their existing assets, primarily within the Sterling Area. But it does not stabilise the pound, nor does it serve the national interest of the U.K. and the Sterling Area countries.

In purely financial terms, the reverse side of these capital exports is first of all the maintenance of large sterling debts and small gold and dollar reserves, and therefore, as stated, of an unstable pound. The sterling debts are to a considerable extent held in British Government securities, the interest on which is of course a charge on the public purse. This charge has steadily gone up as the Tories have pushed up the rate of interest. The other "prop" for these capital exports has been provided by the dollar loans, again a charge on the Budget. Thus, according to Mr. Andrew Shonfield, any extra dividends that have been brought in from abroad by the substantial capital exports of the 1950's "have been swallowed up in meeting the cost of higher rates of interest on our debts" (*British Economic Policy Since the War*,

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page 73). The nation owns the debts, and pays the interest, while monopoly capital owns the new foreign assets, and draws the dividends.

The nation also foots the bill for the maintenance of the general system of imperialism necessary for the private export of capital. Overseas military expenditure by the Government alone amounted to £179 million in 1956 and £162 million in 1957—already a very substantial amount when compared with the inflow from overseas of profits, interest and dividends totalling £350 million in 1957. This figure excludes the profits of the oil companies, and the indirect profits from imperialism of I.C.I., Unilever, Dunlops etc.; but then again we have Mr. R. A. Butler's word for it, in 1954, that but for the burden of the "defence effort" the balance of payments could be improved by £350 million to £400 million annually.

Exports of Capital

An important element in the export of capital is simply the flight of British money from the country because the finance-capitalists no longer have confidence in their own currency. Such flights were noted already under the Labour Government, and more recently there have been the scandals of the Hong Kong and Kuwait "gaps". Until new regulations were introduced, the purchase of dollar securities by British residents was estimated to have reached £45 million in 1955, the same amount in 1956, and no less than £70 million during the first half of 1957.

It is argued that the export of capital assists British exports. But one must insist that exactly the same result could be achieved by letting the Colonies spend their own money, their sterling balances. Moreover the whole contention is extremely questionable. Most of the capital exported goes to the Sterling Area, but between 1952 and 1956, for example, when the outflow of capital was very heavy, U.K. exports to the Sterling Area rose by only 14 per cent, while exports to the rest of the world rose by 30 per cent.

Indeed, in spite of the constant protestations that the export of private capital is the "cement" of the Sterling Area, in recent years trade ties between the U.K. and the other members have persistently weakened. In particular from 1954 to 1957, the proportion of the U.K.'s imports coming from the overseas Sterling Area fell from 44 per cent to 40 per cent, and of exports going to these countries, from 47 per cent to 42 per cent.

It is very far from evident either that the export of private capital corresponds to the needs of the Sterling Area, or indeed that it serves to strengthen the Area, considered as an economic unit. It is, to begin with, a mockery to exact forced loans from the Colonies, and export that money as a contribution to the economic development of the Area. It is doubly a mockery, because the main purpose of these capital exports is still to exploit the labour and natural resources of these countries, to ship these resources abroad as raw materials, and to remit home huge profits. The result is to maintain the economies concerned in a state of completely lop-sided dependence on the fluctuations in world commodity markets. Yet even in this field, a recent report of the Commonwealth Economic Committee shows that the Sterling Area is barely holding its own in the capitalist half of the world as a producer of raw materials, never mind in comparison with the socialist half of the world.

If British finance-capital is really concerned with anything but its own narrowest profit interest, how, again, is it to be explained that as a result of Tory financial policy, amid the outflow of capital from Britain to the tune of £200 million a year, the annual new issues for public bodies in the Commonwealth on the London Stock Exchange fell from £40.8 million in 1953 to £13.8 million in 1956—this when a leading role in economic development has been assumed by the governments of many of these countries?

The Present Situation

Events since 1955 demonstrate the bankruptcy of the policies of British imperialism. In that year an increase in imports and a quite small balance of payments deficit produced a new crisis, because of the underlying weakness of the pound. The Tories' "remedy" was to impose a restrictive internal policy, and stop the increase in production. In 1956 the defence of the overseas property and profits of the British ruling class produced the Suez aggression, a new sterling crisis and more restriction and disruption of production. In 1957, another sterling crisis, when the belief gained ground that the currencies of France and Britain, the two discredited Suez aggressors, would be devalued, and the West German Deutschemark increased in value, and a further tightening of the monetary screw in Britain.

Thus a deliberate policy has been imposed of going back on our brightest economic achievement since the war, i.e. the increase in production. Output has stagnated since 1955 and has now begun to decline, while exports have ceased to expand, and have now started to fall. Contrary to what commonsense might suggest, the American recession and similar economic trends throughout the capitalist world become a reason not to relax the restrictive economic policy but on the contrary to maintain it.

Because the supply of pounds in the world is dangerously inflated by large uncovered sterling debts and capital exports, an artificial reduction in the supply is sought by damping down U.K. pro-

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duction and employment and so keeping down the volume of imports and also, with the aid of the U.S. recession, the price of imports of materials and foodstuffs. Internally this process sharpens the fight against wages and for profits, and prepares the way for a fiercer battle for exports in world markets which contract as the recession develops.

But the sharpening of inter-imperialist economic struggle and manoeuvres for a new dollar hand-out offer no solution for the problems of the British people.

Conclusions

The pound cannot be stabilised on the basis of the financial and economic policies of imperialism, for the very good reason that imperialism itself is a decaying and disintegrating force. The fundamental problem for the British people is to place the pound on an entirely new basis. Such a basis can only be the productive power of the British economy, so that the first requirement is that the grip of monopoly capital on Britain be broken, and a vast expansion of our production carried out. The export achievement since the end of the war is evidence that it is quite possible for Britain to provide the exports needed to pay for our imports, and so bring our current balance of payments into equilibrium.

The second requirement is to end all economic relations with the countries of the Sterling Area and others which are based on domination and financial exploitation, and to substitute relations based on equality and mutual advantage. This will of course rob the capitalist class of profits, but it will remove from Britain the heavy and constantly increasing burden of the political, military and economic measures necessary to ensure these profits.

Britain must of course be able to sell her exports, but this would become rather easier than more difficult once the break were made with imperialism. Thus to finish with imperialism means to finish with the U.S.-imposed bans on East-West trade.

A crucial problem is naturally that of our relations with the countries of the present Sterling Area, which provide nearly half of our imports and which take nearly half our exports. Clearly these trading ties are of great importance. They will certainly change as the economies of the different countries develop, and as new and more diversified trade links are formed, but as far as we can now see ahead, mutual trade will be of great interest to all parties. The problem is to put an end to the fetters and burdens which imperialism has placed on our own economy and those of the other countries of the Area. Then only will all-round economic expansion open up the full possibilities for mutually beneficial trade. At the same time Britain must clearly make an honest settlement of its debts, particularly to the present Colonies. But beyond this, too, the other countries of the Area look for assistance to develop their economies in a form genuinely suited to their needs. I believe that the economy of Britain would be capable of sustaining a serious programme of aid to the under-developed countries, provided that our production is lifted out of its present stagnation and incipient decline and pushed upwards, and provided that our economy is relieved of the fantastic burden of present military expenditures. It is necessary to put a stop to the export of private capital in the narrow and selfish interests of the bourgeoisie and to work out instead a plan for aid based on our real economic possibilities and on the needs of these countries. Trade and the extension of economic assistance would certainly appear to supply the framework of a new and useful economic co-operation between the countries of the present Sterling Area.

Under such new non-imperialist conditions, the future of the Sterling Area as a monetary system could be decided finally only by the independent decision of each of its member countries. The question becomes one in fact of mutual convenience and the solution depends on the exact situation at any given moment. The essential role of the pound would be simply to finance our foreign trade and foreign aid programme. It would no longer serve as a vehicle for the export of private capital and the return flow of profits and dividends and the various other elements of imperial tribute, nor would it be used to pay for military expenditures abroad. The role of the banks would in similar fashion be to finance trade and aid, and not to organise the manipulation and the movement hither and thither of the funds of British or any other capitalists. Given such a basis for operations there is no reason why the pound should not combine stability with a field of activity in the world commensurate with our own international trading needs and relations.

The British Road to Socialism has traced the path to the solution of the problem of Britain's international economic position. With the capitalist half of the world heading towards very serious economic difficulties, it becomes urgent to begin to take steps along this road.

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Britain's Electoral System

Reuben Falber

SINCE the passing of the 1948 Representation of the People Act there has been little or no public discussion in Britain on the electoral system.

The Rochdale by-election in which the Tory candidate finished a bad last with Labour winning the seat on a minority vote, followed by the Liberal victory at Torrington, has destroyed the myth that there are only two political parties in Britain and brought to the fore again the question of electoral reform.

The Liberals claim with some justification that under the present electoral system they are grossly under-represented and that a system of proportional representation would give them a minimum of thirty or forty members in Parliament. In support they point to the fact that in the by-elections contested by them during the past twelve months, their candidates' votes aggregated more than one quarter of the total poll.

While the Liberals are making the running on the need for electoral reform there is much concern in Tory circles at the possible effect of the revival in the fortunes of the Liberal Party on the next General Election. Many Tories anticipate that Liberal intervention in "Tory-held" seats will result in Labour winning on a minority vote and perhaps the Tory candidate being placed ignominiously at the bottom of the poll. There is ample justification for these fears and several constituencies hitherto considered to be impregnable Tory fortresses are now in jeopardy.

Many Tories, especially those whose seats are in jeopardy, have put out feelers for a deal with the Liberals. Although the Liberal Party Executive has rejected the proposition, speculation has not been entirely killed and the Tories lose no opportunity of reminding the Liberals that the majority of their Parliamentary seats are held by the grace of the Tories in towns where a local deal was done in order to defeat the Labour candidate. It is also worth mentioning that the notorious Anti-Socialist Union which is sponsored by "a group of Conservatives, Liberals and Independents" has published a pamphlet *Need the Bell Toll?* in which Edward Martell (a Liberal) advocates "the formation of an anti-Socialist front between Conservatives, Liberals and Independents deliberately designed for the sole purpose of keeping the Socialist out".

The Alternative Vote

Some Tories, feeling that even a deal with the Liberals might not be sufficient, have in desperation begun to reconsider their attitude to the electoral system which has served them so well in the past. The *Economist* wrote (March 8th):

> "It is an article of faith for every good Conservative that the Liberal voter, if he has to choose between a Tory and a Labour Government, will overwhelmingly prefer to 'keep the Socialists out'. But by persisting in voting for his own candidate, the wretch threatens to split the anti-Socialist vote and instal Mr. Gaitskell in office on a minority vote. . . .
>
> "The simple and obvious way out of the dilemma is to enact the Alternative Vote."

Christopher Hollis, a former Tory M.P. for Devizes, has advocated the alternative vote in a feature article in the *Manchester Guardian* in order to defeat Labour at the next General Election, and the proposition has been supported by correspondents in *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, and prominent provincial and Scottish newspapers.

Under this method, where there are more than two candidates, the elector states a second preference on the ballot paper and in the event of no candidate receiving an absolute majority of first preferences, the candidate at the bottom of the poll is eliminated. His second preferences are then distributed among the other candidates and the candidate with the highest total of preferences is then declared elected.

If there are more than three candidates this process continues until one candidate obtains an absolute majority of preferences and is declared elected.

In effect the alternative vote method is similar to the system of the second ballot, but with the elimination of the bargaining among the parties between the two ballots which is customary in those countries where it is in practice.

The Tories are of course not the least interested in a more democratic electoral system. Time and again the present system has given them a big Parliamentary majority even though they have not had anything like the support of the majority of the electors. So long as the system works in their favour it is the best in the world, and on at least four occasions between 1917 and 1931 they fought tooth and nail in Parliament against Bills embodying the alternative vote and succeeded in defeating them.

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Today when every by-election shows that in every constituency they are losing thousands of votes some of them seek an electoral change which will enable them to snap up enough "second string" votes of their lost supporters to enable them to defeat Labour at the next General Election. It has to be said, however, that if the Labour Party were advancing a vigorous alternative policy there would not be the slightest possibility of any consolation for the Tories.

Electoral Reform

The case for electoral reform, however, rests neither on Liberal aspirations nor on Tory fears, but on the need to make fundamental changes in a system which is both undemocratic and unrepresentative, has a substantial bias in favour of the Tories, prevents the representation of minority viewpoints, and holds back the expression of new political ideas and policies.

Electoral reform has a long and honourable record in democratic and working-class politics. The famous six points of the Charter were a programme of electoral reform. The Chartists' demand for manhood suffrage was fulfilled in the Acts of 1867 and 1884, while the struggle for the women's vote, waged by the militant suffragettes prior to the First World War against the stubborn opposition of the Liberal Government of the day, was crowned with success in the Acts of 1918 and 1928. This completed the struggle for the vote for all over the age of twenty-one, and in the 1948 Act the Labour Government abolished the business vote and university representation, two undemocratic features of the system which had always told in favour of the Tories.

The establishment of the principle "one man, one vote" was not sufficient justification for Chuter Ede's claim that the 1948 Act completed the progress begun by the Great Reform Bill. What the 1948 Act did was to complete the uniformity of the electoral system into single-member constituencies and strengthen the monopoly of the two major parties. Far from completing the process of democratisation it made the system still more undemocratic and Parliament even more unrepresentative.

The traditional defence of our electoral system is that it provides strong single-party governments with a stable majority in contrast to the multi-party systems in other countries, which frequently result in coalition governments.

This argument, however, does not stand up to the slightest examination. In 1923 and 1929 there were minority Labour Governments, in 1931 we had a National Government, a coalition dominated by the Tories, and in 1950 there was a Labour majority of six. Further, even Parliamentary majorities have not been backed by a majority in the country, for in the ten general elections since 1922, only two—1931 and 1935—have resulted in the return of a government with a majority of votes over the country as a whole. 1951 was perhaps the classic example in recent political history of the working of the British electoral system, for in the General Election of that year, Labour gained 223,967 more votes than the Tories, yet the Tories had a majority of twenty-six in Parliament. What strength and stability does a Parliamentary majority have when it is opposed by the majority of the electorate?

In nine of the ten General Elections since 1922 the Tories have gained more seats than they would have won under a system which gave parties a representation corresponding to their support in the country. In the six General Elections between 1922 and 1935 the Tories and the Tory-dominated National Governments gained a total of 490 more seats than they were entitled to. This is an average of eighty-two seats a General Election, or more than a quarter of the number of seats required to obtain a majority in Parliament. Truly, anti-Tory parties start with a formidable handicap!

Under a system of proportional representation there would not have been the Tory Government following the 1924 election, and following the 1935 election their majority would have been nearly 200 less. One can only speculate what would have been the outcome in the General Strike and the struggle against fascism but for the gross distortion created by the electoral system. But most certainly proportional representation could have furthered the working class cause in those vital days.

The main reason for the built-in pro-Tory bias in the electoral system is the large number of safe Labour seats. Each seat counts the same in Parliament, no matter what the size of the victor's majority. In the 1955 Parliament, Mr. H. E. Holmes' majority of 34,042 at Hemsworth in the Yorkshire coalfield counted for no more than W. J. Taylor's majority of 69 at Bradford North. Of the 35 majorities of over 20,000 in 1955, 22 were won by Labour.

Mr. D. E. Butler stated that "to secure a majority over Conservatives the Labour Party needed to get 2 per cent more of the votes than them, or, to put it the other way round, the Conservatives stood to win more seats than the Labour Party even though they were as much as 2 per cent—or about 500,000 votes—behind them in the popular poll". (*The Electoral System in Britain* 1918-51.)

The redistribution of seats following the Boundary Commissioners' recommendations in 1954 has, if anything, increased the pro-Tory bias, and there were claims that they would cost the Labour Party up to ten or twelve seats. It is therefore not improbable that the bias is nearer 3 per cent or 700,000 votes.

At that time Herbert Morrison and other Labour

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spokesmen complained that the Commissioners' proposals favoured the Tories. Critics of the Commissioners were rebuked in a *Times* editorial:

> "It has never been regarded as either possible or desirable to justify the British constitution by showing that in elections it worked with mathematical justice and precision. It has always been believed that there is something far more important to be represented than a mere mathematical majority, otherwise the country would long since have been persuaded to try the experiment of proportional representation."

In other words, if you think democracy implies government by the majority, don't expect to find it in Britain.

Incidentally, it is worth noting that both major post-war redistributions of Parliamentary constituencies have worked strongly in favour of the Tories. In 1948 Churchill, in a Commons speech attacking the abolition of university representation and the creation of seventeen new seats, admitted that the 1947 redistribution would cost Labour thirty-five seats in Parliament. Mr. D. E. Butler, in a detailed analysis of the redistribution procedure, concluded: "The neutrality of the Boundary Commissioners is beyond question, but the consequences of redistribution are not necessarily neutral" (p. 211).

This sounds uncommonly like the referee who was "neutral, in favour of the other side".

The Communist Position

The other equally great defect of the system is its effect on minority parties and their representation. It has been stated that it would be theoretically possible for a party whose strength was spread fairly evenly throughout the country to obtain 20 per cent of the votes and yet not win a single seat. Indeed the Liberal Party is conscious of the fact that, even if it can repeat its higher by-election polls in a hundred constituencies at the next General Election, Liberals might win only a handful of additional seats.

But the Communist Party is handicapped as much if not more by the system. The Liberals, owing responsibility to nobody but themselves, can put up candidates wherever they think they can make a good showing in order to realise their aim of winning enough representation to enable them to act as a balancing force between the parties, in the event of a close finish to a General Election. But the Communist Party works to build working class unity in order to defeat the Tories, and all its Parliamentary contests are considered closely in relation to this aim. As a consequence of the opposition by the Labour leaders to all efforts to establish electoral unity, even the most militant and leftward thinking workers are constantly affected by the fear of the split vote letting in the Tory. As a result the number of constituencies contested by the Communist Party is necessarily restricted and where it does contest the split-vote bogy nearly always prevents support for its ideas and policy being fully expressed in its candidates' votes.

In addition, the smaller parties labour under a considerable financial handicap. Contesting elections is an expensive business. In the last three General Elections the Tories spent a total of £1,402,000; the Labour Party £1,210,000; the Liberals £317,000 and the Communist Party £39,600.

In countries with a less rigid electoral system, it is possible for smaller parties to make a nation-wide presentation of their policy. But in Britain the combination of the single-member constituency and expense renders this well nigh impossible for minority parties, and even the Liberals were unable to contest as many as 20 per cent of the seats at the 1955 General Election.

But the Communist Party, despite being a national political organisation, is deprived of radio and television facilities during an election campaign, to say nothing of the fact that it is also deprived of these facilities in between elections. For the wealthy and powerful parties there is plenty of free propaganda on radio and television, but for the party whose number of contests is limited by a combination of limited means and the character of the system, there is nothing.

Further, Section 63 of the 1948 Act prevents a party from taking the opportunity of the heightened political interest prevailing at the time of a General Election by putting its point of view in areas where it is not contesting. In the debate on the 1948 Act Chuter Ede argued that this clause arose from the activities of organisations claiming to be non-party which carried on campaigns in elections in support of Tory and Liberal candidates. Yet when put to the test in law, the Court ruled that the intensive campaigns waged by Tate and Lyle and other powerful monopolists against Labour in the 1950 General Election did not constitute a breach of this section.

It should be added that Sir Hartley Shawcross told the House of Commons (December 5th, 1949) that this section was not "necessarily confined to expenditure incurred only after the dissolution of Parliament or the issue of a writ for an election or the nomination of a candidate". Since it is the declared intention of the Labour Party that the next Labour Government should tighten up this clause, it will be necessary to watch that such an amendment does not encroach on normal political activity.

The £150 Deposit

One of the most iniquitous features of the finances of elections in Britain is the fact that before he can go to the poll, a candidate must deposit £150 with

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the Returning Officer, and provided he obtains more than one-eighth of the total number of valid votes cast this will be returned to him after the poll. Fulfilment of this property qualification is the only requirement; a candidate can be lacking in all other essential qualities, but if he can find £150 his name goes on the ballot paper.

The deposit requirement was first introduced in the 1918 Act. Mr. J. F. S. Ross describes the originators of this "relic of Queen Anne Toryism" as "a comparatively small group of hard-shell Conservatives, the spiritual heirs of the Tories of the 18th century" (*Elections and Electors*, p. 220).

Attempts to delete the clause were defeated, as were proposals to amend it by reducing the amount of the deposit and the proportion of votes required in order to prevent its forfeiture. In the 1944 Speaker's Conference Labour members joined the Tories in opposing its abolition or any substantial amendment of its rules. The one tiny concession proposed by this Conference, that in constituencies where there were more than three candidates, the proportion of votes required to secure the return of the deposit be reduced to one-tenth, was subsequently rejected by the Labour Government and omitted from the 1948 Bill.

It can hardly be claimed that the £150 deposit has prevented the appearance of freak candidates, as a number turn up at every General Election, and now and then one puts in an appearance at a by-election. The freak can usually lay his hands on £150 and, having done this, does not always conduct any campaign worthy of the name. But a serious political party, fighting to build up its support, finds this a serious handicap. If the intention were to bar the freak then the property qualification should be replaced by the proposal made by William Gallacher, when M.P. for West Fife, to the 1944 Speaker's Conference, that a candidate must obtain the signatures of 150 electors on his nomination paper.

Local Elections

The determination of the supporters of the present system to carry the domination of the two-party system right through the political life of the country is shown by their attitude to local government elections. Not one of the arguments in favour of the present system apply to these. The Tories continually lament the introduction of party politics into local government, but in 1923 they opposed a permissive Bill which would have given local authorities the option of using proportional representation. The Bill was defeated by 169-157 and all but fourteen of the votes cast against it came from the Tory benches.

It cannot be argued that the local elections always have the virtue of simplicity, for in the metropolitan boroughs and areas outside the larger cities and towns it is not uncommon for the voter to be presented with a ballot paper containing twelve or more names from whom he must choose six or more councillors. Yet it has never been suggested that there is an appreciably larger number of spoiled papers in such elections.

The Communist Party contests local elections more widely than Parliamentary, and the results provide clearest evidence of the extent to which it is deprived of its due representation by the present electoral system. In the elections for the Fife County Council in May of this year Communist candidates in ten contested wards received 30 per cent of the total votes. But instead of the three seats to which it would have been entitled under a democratic system only one Communist was successful. In three wards of West Lothian the Communist candidates received well over a third of the total poll but none were elected. In some towns where the multiple vote system operates, that is to say the electors cast their votes on a list of candidates for five, six or more vacancies, the Communist candidate received more than one-third of the votes but was not elected.

Any system of proportional representation would result in a substantial increase in the number of Communist councillors, even if no account is taken of the larger number of workers and other electors who would vote for the Communist candidates once the bogy of the split vote was removed and they were able to vote for the best working class candidates without any fear of letting in a Tory or other reactionary.

Not Democratic

The indictment against the electoral system is that (1) it has over and over again resulted in the election of governments which are opposed by the majority of the electorate; (2) it has regularly returned a large number of M.P.s who do not have the support of the majority of their constituents; (3) it restricts the representation of minorities and places barriers in the way of their contesting sufficiently widely to make a national appeal; (4) it is designed to carry the domination of the two major parties into all aspects of the political life of the country.

Hardly the last word in democracy, and as Professor Berriedale Keith suggests, its supporters can scarcely lay claim to the title of democrats. This eminent writer on the British Constitution said of it:

> "Democracy is based on the prevailing influence of numbers; it is therefore logical that the electorate should be so represented as to present in the Commons the proportionate strength of the parties. To prefer to this the haphazard results of the present system argues a certain disbelief in democracy, and a desire to curtail artificially its effective

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working. In fact many people who do not accept democracy approve the present mode of election because it is not democratic." (*The British Cabinet System*, 1830-1938, p. 337.)

Attempts to Reform

The first major attempt to reform the method of voting was the 1917 Speaker's Conference. Included in its twenty recommendations was one unanimously adopted for the introduction of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote in all boroughs entitled to return three or more members (including London outside the City). Yet despite its being a unanimous recommendation of the conference, the government of the day made this one of the only two recommendations on which a free vote was permitted; all others—including the infamous deposit clause—were subject to the party whips. The recommendation in consequence was rejected by 201 to 169, the Tories and a minority of Liberals voting against. Mr. J. F. S. Ross comments:

> "It may be that the Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, who was known to be distrustful of 'proportional representation'—he is said to have declared that he did not understand how it worked, and could not be bothered to find out—had a large share in the decision; but . . . it is pretty certain that the party machines, whips and the officials at headquarters . . . were hostile to the recommendation." (*Elections and Electors*, p. 307.)

In 1923 a Liberal Bill for the alternative vote was supported by Labour but defeated by 208 to 178. A Liberal Bill introduced into the deadlocked Parliament of 1924 was defeated when a majority of Labour M.P.s—led by Herbert Morrison, who is alleged to have been converted to opposition to proportional representation by Ramsay MacDonald—rejected a Cabinet recommendation of support for it and joined hands with the Tories to defeat it by 240 to 146.

Apart from a Bill for the alternative vote promoted by the Labour Government in 1931 which went down with the fall of the Government, there has been no serious attempt at any basic change in the electoral system.

But it would be wrong to think that the issue is dead and buried, any more than the two-party domination will continue indefinitely. Even the comparatively small electoral advance made by the Liberals in recent by-elections has shaken the complacency of some Tories that "all is for the best in the best of all electoral systems".

Of the hundreds of alternative electoral methods advocated, two have been most seriously considered in Britain—the alternative vote and proportional representation, based on the single transferable vote. The alternative vote was described by William Gallacher as "nothing but a variation of our present single member constituency system" (proposals to the 1944 Speaker's Conference). It would not remedy the major defects of the system, for it would still be possible for a government to be elected on a minority of votes, nor would it eliminate the pro-Tory bias in the system, and it would do little to help smaller parties obtain representation.

Its adoption would, however, make the system less rigid by eliminating the bogy of the split vote which has come up in every election where Communists have contested. Workers could decide whether they wanted to be represented by the Labour Party or the Communist Party without being afraid that their choice might let in the candidate of an anti-working-class party.

In its programme *The British Road to Socialism* the Communist Party declares ". . . the electoral system will be democratically transformed with proportional representation and votes at 18" (p. 23). Proportional representation was the proposal put by William Gallacher to the 1944 Speaker's Conference, and in arguing for it he showed that in countries where it operated it had produced stable governments backed by a majority; it had not led to a proliferation of political parties, and it would give parties the representation they had earned in contrast to the present system which as we have seen has nearly always given the Tories a large unearned representation.

Gallacher said the opponents of proportional representation argued that "the purpose of a General Election is not to elect a democratic and representative House of Commons, but to decide which of two parties is to control the Government".

The Two-Party System

This is the crux of the matter. The myth that the two-party system is inherent either in the British character or history is accepted and fostered by social democracy. In a lecture delivered in December 1954 ("In Defence of Politics") Gaitskell suggested various reasons for the strength of the two-party system, among them "architectural—the result of the House of Commons meeting for 300 years in a chamber which was a chapel, divided down the middle into two halves". Mr. Gaitskell should study Parliamentary history, for in the last eighty years alone there have been many periods when three or more parties were represented in strength in Parliament.

There were the Liberal Unionists, the Irish Party, both in the days of Parnell and in the years prior to the First World War. For most of the period between the wars the Liberal Party was represented in strength. Half a century ago Labour became established in Parliament, making a fourth party. Labour representation was achieved mainly through

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alliance with the Liberals, for of the 112 seats won by Labour in the 1906 election and the two elections of 1910, only five were won in the normal three-cornered contests of those days; the remainder were gained either in a straight fight with the Tories or by a Labour candidate running in harness with a Liberal in a two-member constituency. But this alliance would not have come into being but for the fact that it was plain even to Liberals that the working class could no longer be denied independent representation.

The philosophy of the two-party system is a peculiar concept of democracy. Gaitskell expressed it when he said: "We believe the people should have a choice . . . if there is no choice at an election, there is no democracy". A choice, but not too much choice, because if differences between the parties "go too far and run too deep, and are not held in check by a floating vote, democracy may not survive". Couple this with the concept that Labour must not do anything to offend the floating vote and you get an approach to democracy which in effect says that there must be only two parties and both must be basically the same in policy.

This outlook has retarded the Labour movement and it has not paid dividends on the electoral field. In 1955, when Labour and Tory policies were so close as to make it an election which "was not characterised by any great issues" (*The British General Election of* 1955, p. 17)—the Tories got back with an increased majority, a feat no British Government had achieved since Palmerston's day. And of course it has prevented Labour from winning the dissatisfied Tory voters in the recent series of by-elections.

The Labour movement has no interest in perpetuating either the two-party domination or an electoral system designed to perpetuate it.

The Communist Party seeks to "transform Parliament into the effective instrument of the people's will, through which the major legislative measures of the change to socialism will be carried" (*British Road to Socialism*).

The struggle for such a Parliament and more immediately for the defeat of the Tories will be waged, whatever the electoral system. But democratic representation and above all Communist representation would immensely speed up and facilitate the process. The Communist victories in West Fife in 1935 and 1945 and in Stepney in 1945 were gained in three-cornered fights against Tory and Labour opposition, and some of the Communist-held council seats were won in similar circumstances. These victories can be repeated and added to despite the handicap of the electoral system, for working class support for the policies of the Communist Party is growing.

In the factories and trade unions the policy of the Communist Party enjoys mass support and against it there stands the alliance of employers and right-wing social democrats. Among the electorate in the main industrial centres there is a growing understanding that Labour representation alone is insufficient, and that Communist leadership needs to be extended from the industrial field to the council chamber and Parliament.

The ineptness of Labour's opposition in Parliament emphasises the need for Communist representatives to present a fighting policy on all the issues. Neither Transport House bans and proscriptions nor the straitjacket of the two-party system will indefinitely contain working class political thought and action, and sooner or later, the Communist Party will become a force in Parliament.

Discussion on Philosophy: Reply

Philosophy, Criticism and Progress

Maurice Cornforth

JOAN SIMON starts her criticism of my article (in *Marxism Today* last October) by saying that my conclusions are the same as those of Plato. Plato, she might have explained, was the philosopher of ancient Greece who put forward the most uncompromising form of idealism, a representative of the slave-owning aristocracy of the time, one of the first theorists of a totalitarian state. After this comparison, therefore, it is not surprising to find that she says further that I evince "superb arrogance" and want to "enunciate guiding principles from above the battle", and that Michael McCreery caps this by saying that I am an idealist who "lays many traps for the unwary" and who in an undercover way attempts "to revise basic Marxist theory".

These accusations arise from misconceptions about four main problems: (1) values, and the formulation of the aims and objects of our movement; (2) the role of theory in the movement; (3) the relation of class struggle and human progress, or of class and human aims; (4) the subject matter and social responsibility of philosophy. Within the

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limits of space available I would like to comment on these four questions, to see who is departing from Marxism.

1. Values

According to Joan Simon, I say that "it is the philosopher's task to formulate 'values' above the heads of—or as an intermediary for—the people . . . it is he who must tell parties and states what ends to serve and the ways in which they should work towards these".

I certainly did and do maintain that philosophy is concerned with "values": it always has been and always will be so concerned. But why should this be taken to imply that philosophers should lay down the law about values "above the heads of the people"? It is quite true that reactionary philosophers (such as Plato) have often done so. But Marxist philosophy expresses a different outlook.

Are "the people" concerned with values? Yes, of course they are. Nearly everyone is, apart from a few exceptionally cynical or disillusioned types. How often, for example, when we are talking about socialism do we use phrases (and these are not mere phrases but express a deep conviction) such as that we intend to fight for a better society, for the chance for everyone to enjoy life, to have a life worth living, and so on. That is the object and inspiration of socialist struggle. What is the point of all the sacrifice and hardship, unless it has a worth-while aim?

This being so, it is both natural and necessary that discussion should take place about the basis and justification of our ideas of a good or worth-while aim, so that we can defend it the more stoutly and see it the more clearly. Such discussion raises philosophical questions. These are not imposed on the mass socialist movement by philosophers but arise precisely from the existence and needs of the movement.

I would like to repeat what I wrote in the opening sentences of my book *Science versus Idealism*:

"Everybody has some kind of philosophy. . . . Everybody is influenced by philosophical views, even though they have not thought them out for themselves and cannot formulate them. For philosophy is nothing but our most general account of the nature of the world and our place in it—our world outlook. But the working out of philosophical views in an exact and systematic way has become a specialised job. . . . What is most needed is that philosophy should cease to be so specialised—the preserve of the schools—and become the possession of the masses of the people. This does not mean that it should be vulgarised. . . . What it does mean is that philosophy must serve the masses of the people by helping them to answer their own problems."

That, I submit, applies exactly to this question of the working out of our ideas of values.

Joan Simon remarks that the Soviet youth who just now are creating a new life in Siberia "went to create a way of life, themselves; it is doubtful whether any philosophers were there to point the way". But on the contrary, without a doubt there were, and are, hundreds if not thousands of philosophers there. It does seem very unlikely that all these thousands of enthusiastic youth just get on with the job without ever discussing what it is all in aid of. There would be material in these discussions for many books and articles, all of which would be contributing to the new conceptions of values and their basis which are an integral part of the world outlook of our movement.

Joan Simon and Michael McCreery seem to think that if you once begin to debate questions about values, then you immediately sever yourself from the people and start laying down idealistic precepts from above their heads. They are making a mistake here on two counts. (1) It is not true that the people are unconcerned about values: they *are* concerned, and Marxist philosophy should therefore reflect this concern. (2) Most past philosophy has indeed dealt with values in a high-and-mighty, anti-popular way. All the more important is it, therefore, for Marxism to combat such treatment of these questions and to make this part of philosophy, too, the possession of the people.

But I think my critics have been misled by the way past philosophy has put the word "value" to reactionary uses; as a result, they begin to call names the moment it is used. But is it so hard to grasp that there is a *materialist* approach, which relates our ends and purposes to our real conditions and needs—and that "the science of thought and its laws," of which Engels wrote, must include that very vital aspect of thought which is concerned with the formulation of our purposes in life?

For my part, I am sure that Marxism has thrown new light on the problem of the betterment of human life, and will go on doing so. Marxism is not a finished-off dogma; there are many aspects of it which always require elaboration and development, and this is one of them. Marx himself was certainly not afraid to raise such questions. Thus at the very outset of his theoretical work, in the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, he wrote:

"Communism is the actual phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and recovery. It is the necessary pattern and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but is not as such the goal of human development. . . ."

As to what was to be achieved by Communism,

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he used such phrases as "the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man"—phrases which I fear Comrade McCreery must regard as extremely idealist and revisionist examples of "the introduction of an 'end'."

And at the close of his career, in his draft for the third volume of *Capital*, Marx wrote about "that development of human power which is its own end". According to him (for he evidently remained an "idealist" all his life long), the aim and final justification for the reduction of the labour day, to be effected under socialism, was to bring about this "end".

If, then, Marx raised such questions, I think it is correct for us to go on raising them. But yet, according to Comrade McCreery, the contention that we are concerned not with class aims alone but with broad human aims "can be put forward as a justification for deserting the interests of the working class in a time of crisis".

2. Theory

Joan Simon appears to see confirmation of my wishing to make philosophy stand "above the heads of the people" in my remark that it "does not merely repeat and systematise the already spontaneously formed beliefs and aims of a class, but helps form those beliefs and aims, which could not take the form they do otherwise".

"Apparently," she says with scorn, "the working class arrives at ideas and aims not in the process of the class struggle but 'spontaneously', being forced to wait for precise formulations. . . ."

Permit me to quote from a well-known writer on this very subject of "spontaneity":

"Social-democratic consciousness could only be brought to them (the workers) from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness. . . . The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals . . . the theoretical doctrine of social-democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia."

Who wrote that? Some intellectual, no doubt! Yes, it was V. I. Lenin, in the chapter on "The Spontaneity of the Masses and the Class-Consciousness of Social-Democracy" in his book *What is to be Done*? And then Lenin went on to condemn what he called "bowing to spontaneity". He ridiculed the idea that "the pure and simple labour movement can work out an independent ideology for itself". To suppose it could, he said, was "a profound mistake". It is necessary, he insisted, that theory be *worked out*, and be *introduced into* the mass movement.

Revisionist as this may sound if we accept as Marxism Joan Simon's rather naive thesis that the masses themselves acquire all the ideas and aims they need "in the process of the class struggle" without having "to wait for precise formulations", Lenin was in fact only repeating long-established truths of Marxism. Engels had already stressed that "socialism is a science", and so "must be studied". Now sciences are certainly not engendered spontaneously from the class struggle but require a great deal of work by people devoting themselves to such matters. It was always a fundamental principle of Marxism that victory demands *the union* of scientific socialist theory with the mass labour movement.

How very confused Joan Simon is about the whole question of the role of theory—of ideas and consciousness—in our movement is shown a second time by what she says about "the advancement of technique". Increase of knowledge, she asserts, "fundamentally changes the people's way of life". And advance of technique "itself advances men's ideas". That, she continues, "is how new values are created, of all kinds, material and spiritual".

But neither ideas in general nor "values" in particular are advanced a single inch merely by advances in technique. If you doubt that, look at the United States of America. If the Soviet Union is a step ahead in ideas and values, that is not because their techniques are ahead, for until very recently their techniques were behind. Not just technique and knowledge alone, but a change in the basic structure of society in order to employ that technique and knowledge, and moreover, to accomplish that change and carry it forward, a tremendous process of ideological effort and struggle are actually required for the advance of men's ideas and values. Nothing can by-pass what (to borrow words from Comrade McCreery) Lenin so categorically stressed —the need for the *working out* of ideas, of theories, and their introduction into and union with the mass labour movement.

3. Class Struggle and Human Progress

Joan Simon says that "human values" and "general progress" are "what may be called bourgeois-liberal categories". So to try to "invest them with a Marxist content inevitably fails".

Well, Marx was evidently a bourgeois-liberal, or he would not have said that Communism was the means to realise "the human essence". Misled by this, I wrote at the end of my book on *Historical Materialism* about "the truly human conditions of existence which it is the goal of socialism to establish", and have remained unrebuked until now.

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I was perhaps influenced too by a song I remember singing in my youth, which included the lines:

> On with the fight for the cause of Humanity,
> March, march, ye workers, and the world shall be free.

This, however, was not a song of the bourgeois intellectuals but of the Red Army: "the working class" would have fitted the rhythm equally well, but they sang "humanity"—and they meant it. But if a more precise formulation is required, we can turn to Engels:

"The history of class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class—the proletariat—cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class—the bourgeoisie—without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction and class struggles."

This statement by Engels (in his Preface to *The Communist Manifesto*) explains very simply and clearly the intrinsic connection of the working class struggle with general human progress and human values. It explains why, for instance, Marx (in *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*) wrote:

"Communism equals humanism . . . it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man."

Michael McCreery, unlike Joan Simon, admits, though rather grudgingly ("so far, so good"), that through the working class struggle general human progress may be achieved. But he will not accept some of the obvious consequences. Thus he says that I "waver" when I assert (as I shall nevertheless continue to assert) that historical actions can be assessed not solely in terms of the promotion of class interests but also in terms of general human progress. Yet this is precisely how Marx assessed many important events—the French Revolution, for instance. And he says that it "completes" my "ruin" when I also assert that "a philosopher's contribution may transcend class interests in the narrow sense". This, he confidently declares, is "categorically wrong".

But I suggest that Comrade McCreery might read, or re-read, those passages by Marx and Engels which deal with the philosophy of Hegel. They showed that Hegel, the class basis of whose philosophy was never in doubt, made a permanent contribution which proved, indeed, very useful to themselves. When Comrade McCreery writes so "categorically" he is forgetting how Marx and Engels showed that some features of Hegel's philosophy (which Engels summed up as "the system") merely expressed reactionary class ideology, and that at the same time it included other features ("the dialectic") which remained of permanent value. "With all philosophers", wrote Engels, "it is precisely the 'system' which is perishable. . . . Hegel . . . showed us the way out of the labyrinth of 'systems' to real positive knowledge of the world."

But the same two-sidedness belongs to most "great" philosophers—and that regardless of whether the class they represent is progressive or reactionary. Hegel was a reactionary; but Marx's criticism of the great French mechanistic materialists shows equally the distinction he drew between those features which merely reflected their bourgeois limitations and those which made permanent contributions to human thought which would continue to be developed in the future.

It might be added that one of the differences between Marxism and previous philosophies is that whereas they unconsciously presented class-based ideas as eternal truths and absolute values, Marxism consciously recognises and understands the class basis of ideas and values, and in doing so recognises and understands the long-term human significance of the ideas and values which spring from the conditions of the modern working-class struggle for socialism.

Joan Simon is also indignant at my saying that the advances of technique and knowledge (which are measurable advances) do not "in themselves" exhaust the conception of "human progress". Seizing on the words "in themselves", she calls this a "metaphysical formulation".

But what do the words "in itself" or "in themselves" mean? They mean quite simply: "considered in abstraction". Now as Engels pointed out, it is a feature of metaphysics to consider things "in themselves", in abstraction from their interconnections and movement. To confine oneself to considering technique and knowledge "in themselves" would, therefore, be metaphysics. But I said precisely that we should *not* consider them "in themselves", but in their development in essential relation to human uses and purposes. Indeed, to equate progress simply with advance in technique and knowledge is a typical fallacy of metaphysical or mechanistic materialism. For it is such materialism which equates the real simply with the measurable, leaving out the qualitative aspect and considering the quantitative aspect alone.

So when Comrade McCreery declares that there is an "unbridgeable gulf" between the concept of technique and knowledge as measurable quantities and the concept of their serving a way of life and a human purpose, he seems to be confining himself within the limits of that very narrow, dogmatic and metaphysical materialism which it was one of the principal achievements of Marxism to have superseded.

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4. Philosophy

Comrade McCreery finds in my article "upwards of ten definitions of philosophy". But in fact the article, while discussing various aspects of the work and responsibility of philosophy, made no attempt to formulate any comprehensive definition at all. I do not know of any really precise definition. But for most purposes I think the definition quoted above from my book *Science versus Idealism* (for which I claim no originality) fairly satisfactory.

What I did do in my article was to discuss what is "the subject matter" of philosophy; and I pointed out, what remains perfectly true, that philosophy has no subject matter in the sense that the special sciences have. Philosophy does not investigate any particular part or aspect of reality, but its peculiarity lies in the questions it raises. In this way it is a specific form of intellectual activity whereby people test and criticise, and so work out and systematise, their general world outlook. In class society it inevitably has a class character, and its controversies reflect the struggle of classes.

Now Joan Simon says that "it is a primary task of socialist philosophers to examine how Marxism can best be taught". I entirely agree with her. And it seems to me that if one shows the kind of questions which Marxism is raising, the social reasons why such questions are raised, and the approach which Marxism makes to answering them, then that is a very good way of teaching Marxism—both to make clear what Marxism has to say and also the contrast between it and other philosophies. If one wants to show how philosophy has developed historically and to place Marxism in that historical development, then the method of showing how the questions of philosophy have been successively posed is a good method. True, it would not be so good if one's object were to present Marxism as a finished, dogmatic system; but that should not be the object of Marxist education. The approach I am suggesting would help, I believe, to overcome what Joan Simon justifiably calls the "dismal ineptitude" of some Marxist teaching.

What seems specially to have enraged my critics, however, is the use of the word "critical". This word is, of course, sometimes used in a purely negative sense, implying an attitude of fault-finding and rejection. But I had hoped it was obvious that I was using it in a more general and positive sense (as in the familiar phrase "literary criticism", which does not mean merely finding fault with literature). A critical attitude is one which keeps asking: "Why? How is that justified? What problems does it raise?" Such a critical attitude is, I maintained and continue to maintain, an integral part of any genuine philosophy. It is certainly a feature of Marxism. Our philosophy, continually arguing and inquiring, will continue to live and grow despite all efforts to fossilise it.

But the main objection to my thesis "that philosophy is criticism" appears to arise not from its implications regarding the past history of philosophy but from its implications regarding the present. After saying that the premise of all my errors is this thesis about philosophy, Joan Simon winds up: "The whole argument seems by implication to be a criticism of what is, or is not, done in socialist countries." (She also, in passing, ascribes to me the view that, in the socialist countries, the State and Party stand in the way of the people's satisfying their needs.)

Why be so scared of "criticism"? The whole fabric of socialism is not going to be shattered by it. On the contrary, as Marx, Engels, Lenin and (to do him justice) Stalin so often insisted, it will be strengthened; and socialism in fact demands the assistance of continued criticism in order to grow and flourish. We have lived through the tremendous experience of forty years of the Soviet Union, the anti-fascist war and the rise of the People's Democracies in Europe and Asia. These experiences included vast achievements and (as might have been expected too) some errors; and arising from these errors a number of wrongs came to light. So there is a lot to debate, a lot to question and clarify. While in one part of the world the people are still fighting for power, in another part they have won it. So we face not only the problems of overthrowing one rule but of consolidating and developing another. This has to be reflected in the development of our philosophy. When I met some Soviet philosophers four years ago, they told me they considered the central task of Soviet philosophy to be to clarify philosophical questions arising from the transition from Socialism to Communism. They then thought themselves, perhaps, nearer to Communism than they actually were; but it seems to me that this remains a good formulation of a contemporary task.

For my part, I simply do not see how such a task as this can possibly be formulated without including in it those questions, which Joan Simon and Michael McCreery so strongly object to, about the grand human aims which our movement sets before itself. Questions of "the formulation of human purposes" have become of outstanding importance. Always essential elements of Marxism, the great victories of Socialism bring them right to the forefront.

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